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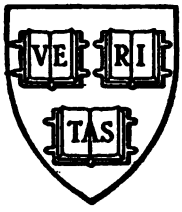


The Butterfly Man

GEORGE·BARR·McCUTCHEON

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The Butterfly Man



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"They, too, were seen together very often of late"
(page 58)

THE BUTTERFLY MAN

By GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

"Author of "The Purple Parasol," "Jane Cable," "The Flyers," "The Alternative," Etc.



With Illustrations
By HARRISON FISHER

A. L. BURT COMPANY
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The Butterfly Man

The Butterfly Man

CHAPTER I

SEDGEWICK BLYNN

THE dinner was being given by Mrs. Cortlandt Trend; that, in itself, was sufficient proof of its smartness if not entirely establishing its excellence along another line.

Mrs. Trend was parsimonious. She had had the bad luck to be born in severe poverty; the silver dollar of her childhood days was a very portentous thing; she never quite got over the feeling that it was a portentous thing. But, despite the fact that she pinched here and there and looked to it that there was no unnecessary waste, her "affairs" were very smart. Mr. Trend was very rich and their home was in truth a mansion. It is of small consequence that Mr. Trend went to bed early; he was never missed. He went to bed early because he had to get up early. His presence at one of her functions would have caused no little surprise and speculation among her guests, — surprise to those who knew him personally or by sight, and speculation among those who did not.

"I saw that chap here once last winter," is the historic remark once made by young Gately, who looked upon

Trend for the second time in his life. "What's his name?"

"Trend," replied some one succinctly.

"Any relation to her?"

"I think so. He's her husband."

"Lord, how he must hate us!" murmured Gately, speaking more truth than he knew.

Mrs. Cortlandt Trend was one of those women who never has an extra bottle of wine opened unless she is sure it will be drunk. It was a habit that came with her from the suburbs, where she was born and bred, and where they open wine with prayer and finally drink it as an epilogue. With all of Trend's millions and in spite of ten years' struggle for social leadership, there were a few tricks she could not forget. Her Bridge prizes were costly and lavish, her cotillion favours beautiful and rare, her service elegant and faultless, her beauty and her wit beyond reproach, and yet — well, the suburb had taught her that it was a sin to waste. It was an established fact — not a confidential rumour, by any means — that Mrs. Trend's dinners were attractive but not at all satisfying. And yet it was very much in order to covet an invitation to her admirably conducted establishment. Her entertainments were so frequent that poor Trend, who breakfasted before she was awake and who lunched in town, seldom saw her unless she were of a mind to come to his room, where he dined alone and in the simple splendour of a smoking jacket. Not more than three times a year was it neces-

sary for Trend to shave himself in the evening, for which he was devoutly thankful.

Three persons were chatting in a far corner of the drawing-room — two men and a woman. Already it was far past the dinner hour, and these were Bridge fiends. Their hostess, serene and unruffled, went by.

"It 's half-past eight, Mrs. Trend," ventured one of the men, with the privilege of an old acquaintance who takes the liberty of being annoyed if he feels like it.

"Is n't it shocking?" she exclaimed, pausing. "But the dinner won't be spoiled, George. When I invite Sedgewick Blynn to dinner I invariably allow half an hour for his shortcoming. Eight means half past to him."

"Why don't you operate on a schedule that might lead him to infer that half-past seven is eight?" asked George Pennington.

"You mean, ask him for seven thirty when I want him at eight? My dear man, he 'd never forgive me," she said as she passed on.

"We might have known it was Blynn," growled Stanley, when she was out of hearing. "He makes it a business of being late everywhere." After a moment's reflection, he went on: "It 's not a bad way, either, if one wants to keep constantly in the limelight. Here we are kept waiting half an hour — for whom? There 's only one name on our lips — Sedgewick Blynn's. It 's a bully way of advertising."

"He 's very agreeable and amusing, no matter how late he may be," said Miss Carnahan.

"Oh, we 'll grant you that. No well regulated party seems complete without him these days. He does n't let lost time count against him. We may revile him for being late but we rejoice when he is with us. And, to save my soul, I can't precisely see where his charm comes in," said Pennington grudgingly. Pennington needed a cigarette.

"It 's his everlasting good humour," said Stanley, "and a certain form of modesty that baffles you at all turns. If you curse him, you 're sorry for it when he smiles that winning smile of his and shakes your hand as if he was never so happy as when greeting you. You like him in spite of yourself — and sometimes you wonder why."

"I never wonder why," protested the young woman, a bud of the season. "He 's *so* nice, and he *is* good-looking."

"Rather stands us middle-aged mummies against the wall, I take it, Miss Carnahan. You are very unkind. Remember our age," said Pennington. "Let me see, is n't he the son of old Henry Blynn, who used to be cashier at the Union Commercial?"

"Yes. Henry died three or four years ago. Sedgewick lives out in Lombard Avenue with his mother and his two sisters — you remember the Blynn girls, fifteen or eighteen years back? Old maids now."

"Perfectly. You see, Miss Carnahan, I 'm somewhat

of a stranger in an old familiar land. I went abroad to live ten years ago. Many things have happened here since then. One of them is Sedgewick Blynn. He was n't known in my day. Now he is the rage."

"He 's asked everywhere," agreed Miss Carnahan, as if nothing more was to be desired.

"As I remember his father, Stanley, the old man was — er — something of a nose-grinder. Always grubbing for both ends. Did he leave much of an estate?"

"The house in Lombard Avenue, I believe, and enough for Mrs. Blynn and the girls to get on with in a very modest way."

"This young chap seems to have made something of himself, then, I take it. It costs money to live up to these friends of his. 'Gad, his dad was n't able to go in for society in any shape or form. One never heard of the Blynns in my day. Nice people, Miss Carnahan, believe me, but — " Pennington hesitated.

"They went to church regularly," supplied Stanley. "So did we in those days. It had something to do with fashion, I believe. Every one who went to St. Mark's knew the Blynn girls."

"What is Sedgewick's business?" asked Pennington.

"He is a broker — full-fledged now, I believe. Graduated not long ago from Warmley & Broad's offices. He 's gone in for himself lately. Offices in the Commercial. But, I 'll leave it to Miss Carnahan, his operations seem to be chiefly in presents, not futures. Am I not right?"

"If you mean to be paradoxical, I must confess I 'm horribly stupid. I only know that he 's very successful. He told me last night of a deal he 'd made in copper — or was it brass? It — "

"Brass, more than likely," said Stanley drily.

She did not feel the sting, but smiled serenely and went on: "I know so little about what you men trade in. Is it brass? Well, Mr. Blynn was saying at Mrs. Grant's last night that he 'd pulled off a big deal in something. Yesterday morning at the musicale he told me he was sure to pull it off, and he did, you see. He 's quite musical, you know."

"Pulled it off in the afternoon, I see."

"I 'm not sure," she said doubtfully. "He went out to Briarly on the one o'clock train to skate with the Ralphs. Dear me, how much he does! He was nearly an hour late at Mrs. Grant's dinner last night. Did you ever know of any one so popular, Mr. Stanley?"

At that moment Mr. Blynn was announced. There was an almost audible sigh of relief; the "Bridgers" stirred hopefully, and more than one gave him an amiable smile as he crossed to Mrs. Trend.

"I 'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Trend," he murmured, as she gave him her hand. As usual, he was somewhat breathless, as if haste had tried not to make waste. She smiled graciously and tapped his arm with her fan. Whereupon he was more than ever contrite; he went so far as to smile rather pathetically. "A representative from Mr. Morgan's office came in late this afternoon in

respect to a very important matter I am looking after for him. 'Pon my word, I could n't break away from him. After all, you see, Mrs. Trend, I 'm rather — er — well, you might say, beholden to Mr. Morgan for a fair share of my business these days. I — I, well, you understand, I really could n't afford to be rude to the fellow. Business is business in these awful days. You will overlook it this time, won't you?" He looked at his watch with an air of abject humility; then a rare glow of confidence came into his face. "Why, dear me, I 'm only half an hour late, as it is. It seemed hours to me."

"You 're a nice boy to come on such short notice, so I 'll forgive you," she said. "Mr. Blake's mother is ill, and he telephoned at three that he could not leave her. You don't mind being asked to fill in at the last moment?"

"Never, when it is to fill in at your house. From the bottom of my heart, I hope you may always be so unlucky as to have some one drop out at the very last minute," he said gallantly.

"And afford you the chance to drop in at the very last minute," she said, with an almost imperceptible reproof in her voice. He was quick-witted; she was sorry when he flushed. A wrinkle of pain came to the corners of his eyes.

"I 'm awfully sorry," he reiterated. "Pray don't delay any longer, dear Mrs. Trend. I 'm used to being hustled in to dinner. Heaven knows why I should

always be late. Besides, you must let me defend myself to this extent: I did n't get your message until after six. I had been with Morgan's man all afternoon. Luckily my evening clothes were at the club, or I should have been later. I did n't leave my offices until nearly half-past seven. It was the busiest afternoon I 've had in six months. Sometimes I hate my office. It 's like a jail."

"Now, Sedgewick," she said, looking him calmly in the eyes, "that 's all rubbish. My secretary called up your offices four times between three o'clock and six. Your stenographer said you were out. I am quite ready to believe that you *do* hate your office."

For a moment he was speechless, but not fazed. His mind was working like a trip-hammer. The affable, apologetic smile crept into his face.

"I 'm more grieved than ever, now that I know it was you who called," he said. "I gave the girl instructions to say to every one who called up that I was out. That man from Morgan's is an arbitrary chap. He monopolises all — "

"Oh, how satisfactory you are!" she cried, with something like real admiration in her voice. He was perhaps justified in congratulating himself upon his own astuteness. It was not likely that she would ever hear that he had played Bridge all the afternoon at Mrs. Fielding's. He knew that Mrs. Trend and Mrs. Fielding did not see anything of each other these days. Mrs. Fielding somehow had dropped out of everything and

no one cared to mention her name, unless forced to do so. Something about a married man, "and all that sort of thing."

Mr. Blynn, having delayed dinner quite three quarters of an hour, thereby sustaining his no uncertain position in the limelight, was one of the first in the dining-room after all. It was his way of doing penance, so to speak. Besides, he was ever ready to assist other guests in finding their places. With his dinner partner on his arm, or tagging close behind, it was his custom to make the circuit of the long table before coming to his own chair; from time to time he courteously indicated places to those who may have been perfectly capable of finding them without aid, but who thought it very nice of him just the same.

Blynn was a most obliging and thoughtful chap — and quite good to look at. A rare sense of modesty saved him from the odium that fell upon the less wily and more intrusive fellows of his own age and position in society. He never obtruded himself or his talents, but was ever ready to devote his entire time and energy to the enterprises of his hostess or his guests. Other young men in his set properly may have been accused of boisterous though good-natured methods, but not so with Sedgewick Blynn. He waited until he was asked to supply the demand and then gave more than his share with a frankness that was pleasingly free from conceit.

As a result, he was always called upon to do more than his share, in more ways than one, and despite an

apparent desire to give others the right of way, he was never out of reach when wanted. Be it said to his credit, so gentle was he in his triumphs that little or no envy filled the souls of his fellow men. In fact, they formed his cabinet.

Blynn was young, but not too young; handsome, but not too handsome. He was twenty-six, a slender, tall, fair-haired fellow with keen blue eyes and a patrician nose. When he smiled he showed his white teeth in a most amiable fashion; when he laughed aloud at some other fellow's joke, he invariably brought joy to the heart of the narrator by the fervent genuineness of his mirth. One could always feel assured of Sedgewick Blynn's appreciation, no matter how hoary the joke. Graceful, easy, gallant, he was ever a joy to the box party, the dinner, the dance and the — debutante. Small wonder, then, you would have said, if you could have seen or met him, that he was so much in demand by the smartest people in town. One likes to have a Beau Brummel about, even though he eschews the arrogance of the original and confesses, instead, to a lifelong state of modesty and self-disparagement.

He played Bridge consistently and well — and usually won. In defence of this, he lugubriously confessed to an unhappy poverty that sharpened his card-sense to the point of infallibility. Moreover, he was agreeably willing to play for a quarter of a cent or a dollar; he was never peevish about it, which is more than can be said for most gambling devotees of the game. Of course,

he had to lose occasionally. It may be worth while, in depicting his character, to say that he lost only when playing for a quarter of a cent or a half; obviously, he felt it worth while to concentrate his card-sense on the game only when it comprehended something beyond the ludicrous. What is more, he was perfectly content to play when there were no stakes at all. A *most* agreeable chap, you must admit.

He sang, — coon songs or ballads, as occasion required, — and sang well, playing his own accompaniments with vigour or tenderness — as occasion required — so that all others might desert him if they chose — a circumstance which never happened. Even the oldest grey-head hung about to join in the merry chorus when he came to it. One could not help it. And, greater than all this, he knew when to stop singing and playing. He left them wanting more, not calling him a bore — which is a truth as well as a rhyme.

As a story teller he had few equals. In a tête-à-tête he had no equals — a very broad assertion, but, at present, undisputed. Proud the unfledged but well-developed bud who had him all to herself, and most gallant he in spite of all her first-bloom innocuousness. He could make love to her so deliciously and so inoffensively that no mother could wish for more — or less, for that matter. Old ladies adored him, and the middle-aged ones (God knows why there are so few of them — but, then, God is good!) cherished him as if he were a thing that might have been forbidden.

No woman was so old or so doddering that her conversation failed to hold his most interested and undivided attention; the older she got the more tenacious the hold. It is not strange that they talked of him incessantly, telling each other how much he was like those dear gallants of the day when they were young — all of which became an asset in his fair stock of aspirations.

He gossiped delightfully and never promiscuously. He knew all the scandal, but he was wise enough and strong enough to whisper it into one ear at a time. Everybody said he was delightful, which was the only gossip that he cared to have go farther.

He could borrow money of any man in his club, and that is saying a great deal, for him and for the club. One cannot withhold this supplemental word of praise for the club. It is not, perhaps, quite true that he was prompt or even prone to repay the loans thus established; he was of the earth and not of the kingdom of heaven.

At Mrs. Trend's dinner he sat between Miss Carnahan, whom he had taken out, and Mrs. Rounseville, the coal baron's wife. Mrs. Rounseville was always distressed by the servant question. It was not that she could not keep servants after she got them, but that they were forever eating her out of house and home. In lamenting this extraordinary condition of affairs, she was afforded the pleasant sadness of announcing the number of servants she kept — and just what their duties were.

"We have fourteen in that wretched apartment of ours, Miss Carnahan," she almost wailed across Mr.


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"In a tête-à-tête he had no equals"

Blynn's front. (There were seventeen rooms in the apartment, besides the extra servants' quarters near the roof.) Miss Carnahan involuntarily tried to recall the number of servants in her father's immense house on the Boulevard. Colonel Carnahan was fabulously rich. Bessie could not even remember how many footmen they had. Sedgewick Blynn was properly impressed, although he had heard all about the Rounseville servants half a dozen times at least. It seems that the good coal baroness included the janitor, the man who shovelled snow by the job, the window washer and one or two other co-operative menials in her private ménage. Mrs. Rounseville was a snob.

"Fourteen? Dear me!" he said politely.

"Do you know, Mr. Blynn, my horror of thirteen actually compels us to pay for an extra and absolutely unnecessary maid? Now, don't laugh at me! I can't help it. Mr. Rounseville says I am foolish, but — well, I just could n't bear the thought of having thirteen servants. Twelve would not be sufficient, you see, and fourteen is one too many. But I just could not bear the thought of telling people that I had thirteen. Think of it! Thirteen!"

"You could get around the hoodoo, Mrs. Rounseville, by saying you keep between twelve and fourteen," recommended he blandly. "Why say thirteen?"

"I never thought of that," she cried. Miss Carnahan beamed upon him. No wonder people said that he was bright! Mrs. Rounseville bored her excessively; she

could not help admiring the way in which Blynn submitted to the long-winded and rather pathetic details attending the hiring of a new cook — who, it seems, was to prove a treasure. "You must come in to-morrow night for dinner, Mr. Blynn, and get the actual proof of what I say." Mr. Blynn said it would give him great pleasure to get out of a stupid engagement at the club. He would come with joy and gladness. For that matter, he 'd be delighted to come if she had no cook at all!

Mrs. Rounseville spent the rest of the evening telling people how nice he was, even though she could n't quite place his family.

Before the evening was over, Sedgewick Blynn had graciously booked four dinner engagements, a theatre party, a Sunday night supper, three Bridges, and any number of afternoon visits into serene dove-cotes — many of them as far ahead as a month. From which it may be gathered that he was very much in demand and very hard to attain on short notice. Inasmuch as he was required to devote considerable time to his duties as floor-manager of the next Charity Ball, as secretary of the Orphans' Home bazaar, as leader of the Assemblies' cotillions, as chairman of the Winter Club sports committee, as stage-manager of the Amateur Dramatic Club and to other social jobs, it is not surprising that he had to think carefully before accepting intermediate invitations; or, for that matter, before arranging purely business engagements.

He was a wise young owl in that he spent none of his time in drinking bouts. His habits were exemplary.

After dinner, and while the players were seeking their tables, he found his opportunity to carry Bessie Carnahan off to a secluded corner for the brief though expected "confidential" that, of late, they were so prone to covet.

They sat in the shadow of the grand staircase, their voices low, their heads quite close together. For five minutes their conversation, too inane to repeat, savoured of the vapid exchanges one has a right to expect from just such *exaltées*. His cool, impelling blue eyes never left her flushed face. Every time she glanced at his face, his teeth were showing in his most eager smile. She was nineteen, she was shy, and she was not yet past the stage when a man's look serves to perturb. Miss Carnahan, very pretty and very desirable, was just now the apple of Blynn's eye. Her father had millions, with a great city house, a home in the mountains and one in rural England. Besides, she had three automobiles for her very own. Blynn, of late, rode a great deal in one or another of them. He never failed to contribute the remark that her car was the best on the market; and he could tell you all about the cylinders.

"Then you will tell Gately that you have a headache and can't see him to-morrow afternoon?" he said, concluding a mild but insistent appeal which was in reality an argument.

"Of course, if you like," she murmured, almost

frightened by the thought of stealing such happiness. It would be lying, after all, she reflected, and she was still the younger sister of older liars. "He will be furious."

"But you 'd rather have me around, would n't you?" he insisted. "I want to see you to-morrow. I 've got something to tell you — important."

"Can't you tell me now?" she cried — and then wondered if he would.

"I can't, because it all depends on to-night," he said with the mysterious seriousness that makes all young girls regret that their brains are too immature to grasp the sage subtleness of the well-rounded man of the world.

"Oh, please tell me," she pleaded. "You know I 'll not sleep a wink if you don't."

"That 's just what I 'm after," he said softly. "I want to be the cause of keeping you awake. I want you to think of me all night long. I want — "

"What a hag I 'd be in the morning," she cried with a pretty grimace.

"Not in a million years," he protested in the language dearest to a heart no older than hers. His fingers touched hers as they lay on the arm of the big chair. Emboldened, he clasped her little hand gently, insinuating his courage into her quivering nerves.

She withdrew her hand quickly and a startled look came into her young dark eyes. The gentle attack had come too soon; the affair had not grown to such pro-

portions. Through her simple, untried brain danced the confessions of other girls who had said that he squeezed their fingers so deliciously when dancing. And, then, like a flash, there came to her the memory of a story in which a young and fashionable married woman was involved. She remembered sharply that there had been gossip — that he owed his advent into the smart world to the influence of this clever matron, who had vouched for him, paraded him, flirted flagrantly with him, and then had dropped out of the respectable set as a comet disappears into space. Somehow this tender girl, for the first time in her life, instinctively felt the caution of her sex creeping into existence; she was capable of reflection. This was the moment which comes to every girl — the moment when she begins to analyse the motives of the opposite sex — for it is always opposite.

"Forgive me," he murmured abjectly. She imagined that he turned very pale. Her heart fluttered, but something cold raced down to her finger-tips. All she could do was to smile, with a sharp, sob-like catch in her breath. She was learning a new lesson in life.

At that moment some one came into the hall and in exasperated tones called out to Blynn to hurry up: he was delaying the game.

Blynn arose instantly. "I 'll see you to-morrow at four?" he said, his eyes bent closely upon hers. She nodded and smiled.

"But won't it interfere with your business?" she asked archly. Sedgewick Blynn gallantly waved his

hand in deprecation. He did not consider it worth while to confess that *she* was his business. She was an only child and the best investment in the city.

"Oh, by Jove," he said, abruptly stopping, an expression of genuine dismay in his face. A subtle shadow crept into his eyes. "I — I almost forgot to telephone to my mother."

"Your mother?"

"Yes, I — usually call up about her bedtime, don't you know. She likes to have me say good-night when I can. Will you — " with a pleading smile — "excuse me while I run into the telephone room and call her up? Tell 'em in there that I 'll not be a minute."

He entered the telephone room off the hall, and she crossed to the card rooms. Pennington appeared in the door.

"Where 's Blynn? We 're waiting, Miss Carnahan."

"He has just gone in to telephone to his mother," she said, her face flushed, her eyes bright.

"The dick — beg pardon!"

"He usually telephones good-night to her," she said, with an unconscious glow of pride.

Pennington's lean, grey face wore a puzzled look for an instant. Then a warm flush suffused it. A new light came into his eyes as he glanced toward the telephone room.

"I don't mind saying, Miss Carnahan, that my respect for your young blade has doubled — yes, trebled in the last minute. To say good-night to his mother! By Jove, his heart 's all right!"

Inside the telephone room, in subdued tones, Sedgewick Blynn was saying:

"Hello, mother! That you? I called the house three times before half-past seven. Confound this telephone service, anyway. I tried my best to get you. I 'm awfully sorry to have disappointed you and the girls. . . . The tickets? I — I 've got 'em in my pocket. If I 'd had any sense I could have sent 'em out to you by messenger. . . . It 's too bad, mother. You see, I was n't able to shake that fellow from Morgan's until ten minutes ago. It was terribly important, you know. . . . Yes, I think it will be a good thing for me. . . . Oh, that 's too bad! I 'm sorry you and the girls sat around there with your things on, waiting for me. We 'll try it again next week. I 'll get seats for the same play. . . . You kept your hats on till half-past nine? By George, it 's a rotten shame! I 'm going to complain to-morrow to the manager of this beastly telephone company. It 's an outrage. What? . . . Oh! Good-night!"

CHAPTER II

IN LOMBARD AVENUE

THE Blynn establishment in Lombard Avenue was a very modest one. The house was an old one but comfortable. Mrs. Blynn had about three thousand a year; on this she and her daughters could have lived comfortably, despite the taxes, had it not been necessary to devote no little share of their income to the business necessities of the head of the family — the son and brother, who was now operating for himself. In him the sun rose and set: he was, so to speak, the family sun. The widow, a dear old lady, with the foresight and strength to oppose his one-time plan to mortgage the house so that he could obtain a controlling interest in a new and wonderful copper mine that bade fair to turn into the proverbial "gold mine" in the end, believed in him as she had believed in her husband when their days were young and their struggles tense. She expected to see this son of hers high in the financial world before her long day's work was done.

It is quite possible that her daughters now and again had felt some little misgiving concerning Sedgewick and

secretly expressed their vague doubts, but, if such were the case, up to this time they had kept their fears to themselves. Sisters, as a rule, do not see a man through eyes so kindly and so obscured as those which lie in a mother's head. They were not so sure of Sedgewick! Anna was forty-three and Hettie thirty-nine. They were vastly older, it may be seen, than the idol of the home in Lombard Avenue; they were born in the days of their father's hardest fight for success, not when he was ready to say that he was safe against the possibility of absolute failure. Sedgewick was the son of his easy, optimistic days. It is not unnatural, then, that they should have a different outlook upon the world. They loved Sedgewick — idolised him, in fact — but they — well, they often wondered.

There were two servants in the house, old and faithful servitors: the cook who was strong enough and willing enough to take care of the furnace, and the housemaid, who did the washing and ironing on Mondays and Tuesdays and made no complaint about serving breakfast to Sedgewick, no matter how late the hour, in bed or out of it. On wash days and ironing days, the Blynn sisters put aside their church sewing and reading and did the up-stairs work of the housemaid.

That the women of the family were proud of and glorified by Sedgewick's social elevation was no matter for speculation. They made no doubt that he was deserving of the position he had achieved in the almost impregnable smart set; they were content to skimp and

sacrifice in order that he might hold his own for the glory of the family. They could imagine no greater recompense than the happiness which should be theirs when he at last led to the altar one of those fair young creatures of purple and fine linen, thereby ensconcing himself serenely for all time among the things that are gilded.

The two sisters, at times, may have dwelt luxuriously in dreams of marriage for themselves, but time and Sedgewick had made these dreams a waste of deserted hopes. There was, alas, nothing left for them but church work and devotion to the unclad heathen. Which seems all the more a pity when one realises that they were not uncomely, nor were they soured by protracted virginity.

The family saw but little of Sedgewick in these triumphal days. He was so seldom at home for dinner that a plate was never laid for him; he had his breakfasts there, and it was then that these eager worshippers listened to his tales of the gilded sea through which he floated. It goes without saying that they were properly impressed, despite his manly declaration that he was tired of it all and longed for quiet evenings at home. When, on occasion, he was at home for an evening, the celebration was somewhat tempered by the distressing fear that he had been slighted in not receiving an invitation to spend the time elsewhere.

Once — how well remembered! — he deliberately declined at least half a dozen invitations for dinner and the

theatre, steadfastly assuring his mother and sisters that he was determined to spend the evening with them. They would play a few rubbers at Bridge and let society go hang! It was on this eventful occasion that his mother volunteered to guarantee the payment of certain office and club expenses amounting to something like two thousand dollars. It required an hour of earnest insistence on the part of all of them before he would consent to accept the advancement! He merely had mentioned the indebtedness in explanation of a steady headache which had been bothering him of late. Not for the world . . . .

On the evening of Mrs. Trend's dinner party, Mrs. Blynn and her daughters, considerably excited by the prospect of a treat at the theatre, dressed early and in their best. They waited dinner for Sedgewick until after seven, and then, somewhat dismayed, sat down to it without him.

"It 's the abominable street car service," explained Miss Anna, with more irritation in her voice than was usual. "The cars never run when you want them to."

"We'll be late and I always like to be there when the curtain goes up," lamented Miss Hettie. "Why could n't he have started home earlier? He is n't with us so often that he might not afford to break away from his office early once in a while."

"Now, Hettie, don't find fault with Sedgewick," interposed the mother quietly. "He's been delayed on the way out. as Anna says. Poor boy, I fancy he's

stamping his feet in despair in some blocked street car along the line."

"He said he'd be here by six," mumbled the rebellious Miss Hettie. Being the younger of the two sisters, she naturally observed less restraint in commenting upon the shortcomings of the next in order of birth. "You know, Anna, he *could* step into a drugstore and telephone to us if the blockade is a serious one."

"He'll be here in a few minutes, never fear," said Mrs. Blynn staunchly. "Katie, will you tell Bridget to keep something warm for Mr. Sedgewick? He'll be in a great hurry when he comes in. Anna, perhaps you'd better get out his evening clothes and — "

"Mother, he dresses at the club every night of his life," interrupted Miss Hettie. "His clothes are there, you forget."

"So they are, so they are. Poor boy, how busy they must keep one in society."

Miss Hettie's black eyes sent a sharp, inquiring glance at Miss Anna's serene, sweet face, and detected there a momentary shade of annoyance. Miss Anna's hair was grey at the temples, and dark, luminous eyes peered through glasses that were not youthful. The younger sister was dark and sharp featured, without a grey thread in her hair. Both were still good-looking women, fading slowly because their lives had been gently spent.

"His shirts and collars are — are delivered at the club by the laundry," added Mrs. Blynn reflectively. "Dear me, how little we *do* see of him."

"We don't see even his shirts and collars," remarked Miss Hettie, with a dry smile.

"We darn his socks," protested Miss Anna loyally, affecting a gay little laugh.

"And sew on his buttons," added her sister.

"My dears, it does n't take much of our time, and we ought to be happy in doing it."

"We are happy," cried both sisters promptly.

Nothing more was said until the coffee was served, each apparently giving herself over to her own thoughts and impressions. A line between Miss Anna's gentle eyes deepened perceptibly, while the flush in Miss Hettie's cheeks grew darker as if stirred from beneath by some suppressed force.

"It's nearly eight," she mentioned.

"I — I shall go up-stairs and put on my hat," said their mother, rising slowly. "We must not keep him waiting."

The sisters looked at each other in silence as she moved toward the door.

"If he only had sent the tickets out to us, we might have joined him at the theatre," Miss Hettie could not resist saying.

"Mother, you must not forget to bring down your heavy muffler," cautioned Miss Anna. "Remember you have a bad cold starting in. Really, I'd be rather pleased if we were not to go out to-night, after all. Your cold distresses me."

"It's nothing. And I would n't disappoint Sedgewick

for the world. He has counted on this evening for a week or more."

"I'll be up-stairs in a minute to help you with your veil, mother," said Miss Hettie

"Don't be late, dears. Don't keep him waiting."

They could not see the tears of pain that came into her eyes as she slowly mounted the stairs. She had just come to realize that he had forgotten her!

The sisters sat for many minutes, stirring their coffee without so much as a glance at each other. Neither seemed to be willing to be the first to utter the convictions that had grown firm in their minds.

"He's forgotten it, Hettie," said Anna at last, without looking up.

"I don't mind so much for myself," said the other wearily. "It's mother."

"It is n't possible that he could have met with an accident?" volunteered the elder, almost hopefully.

"It's more than possible that he has accidentally met some one who has asked him to do something else."

"Mother has been so delighted over the prospect of seeing Miss Barrymore," said Miss Anna. After a moment's indecision she blazed forth, a wide rift in her usual placidity: "He — he ought to be ashamed of himself! After all she does for him, too! To forget her! Hettie, it's cruel — it's heartless! I don't care about seeing the play — I can get on without it. Heaven knows we're not in the habit of going to the theatre, so it does n't hurt so much in that way. But we could have

had a jolly evening, the four of us, and mother had counted on it so much — the play and the little supper afterward. Hettie, do you know that she drew some money from the bank yesterday so that Sedge need n't be embarrassed about ordering a good supper — he's always short, you know. I — I love Sedgewick, but — but why can't he be a little different toward mother? He thinks of nothing but his society friends — society, society, society!"

"The cemetery of unselfishness," said Miss Hettie, who was epigrammatic. "It's a whirlpool and he's been dragged into it — he's lost to us, Anna. He's even lost to mother. He never thinks of us — he never thinks of her. There are days and days when we don't see him nor even hear from him on the 'phone. He has time to go to the houses of a hundred other people, but not time to come to his own. I don't like to say it, Anna, but he never gives us a spare hour of his time unless he's hard up and wants to wheedle something out of mother. If he's got such a wonderful business, why does n't he give something to her instead of taking it away from her?"

"Hettie! You know we are all glad to help him along in his business. He's just starting out and — "

"I know it's mean of me to say it, but I can't help it. I'm mad and I'm going to say what I feel. It is n't business that keeps him away from mother twenty-nine nights in the month and it is n't business that runs up his club, livery, and restaurant bills until he can't pay them.

Anna, don't you know that we have n't had a decent new dress, either of us, in two years? How many suits of clothes — silk underwear, shirts, high hats, overcoats, and all that, has he had in — well, in the last six months? And from whom does he borrow the money to pay for them? Thank heaven, we don't need a new dress every six months, but I'd like to feel that I could ask for it without robbing mother. It may be true that we are — are pensioners, in plain words — "

"Oh, don't say that, Hettie!"

"Pensioners, that's just it. We are women and we did n't marry. We are drags. We may toil and we may spin after a fashion, but we have failed to do the thing which was expected of us. We still subsist from mother's hand. She does not resent it, but I'll bet anything that Sedgewick feels that we are an everlasting drain on poor mother's little store. He can't see why we've never married. He can't see why father provided for us as well as for him. We should have had husbands to make livings for us. That's our crime against the law and order of things. He feels, and I know it, that we are dreadful burdens to mother, in spite of the fact that we cheerfully give to him from our own share of what father left to all of us in common."

"He can't think *that* of us," groaned Miss Anna.

"Certainly he can. Why not? We're old maids — and, heaven be praised, we're healthy. We'll live a long time. Maybe he thinks we'll expect him to take care of us in our old age."

"You should n't say such things, Hettie."

"Perhaps I should n't, dear," said Miss Hettie, after a moment of reflection. "He *is* a dear boy and I love him. We ought to be proud of him — of his position — of his prospects. Yes, he *will* succeed; I am a mean cat to say the things I have said. I'm sorry." There was another long silence between the distressed sisters. Then Miss Hettie spoke up decisively. "But he won't come to-night. He has forgotten us. And mother is up-stairs putting on her things to go out. It's ten minutes past eight. Have you an idea that he will come? No!"

"He *could* have telephoned," murmured Miss Anna in despair. "He might have done that."

"He *would* have done it if — if he had not forgotten it altogether."

"He telephoned out to her yesterday. I heard her talking to him. Afterwards she told me that he had an opportunity to sell four of those Consolidated Gas bonds at a fine profit. She's talking of getting them out of the vault next week."

"I wonder if it's best to sell any of those bonds," mused Miss Hettie, who had a fair sense of business.

"She's going to talk it over with Mr. Foote at the bank. Do you know, Hettie, I half suspect she does n't really trust to Sedge's judgment."

"He sold the Pullman stock, you remember," said Miss Hettie meaningly.

"Well, he explained that," protested Miss Anna, from which it may be gathered that the transfer was ill-

advised. "It might have gone lower in the slump or whatever you call it."

"But it was costing us nothing to hold it, Mr. Foote said."

"Girls!" called their mother from the head of the stairs. The sisters started guiltily

"Yes, mother," called out Miss Hettie. "Coming."

"Get your things on. He'll be in a great hurry. We'll miss some of the play, as it is."

They looked at each other pityingly as they arose and started to obey the summons.

"Poor mother," murmured Miss Anna.

"Her cold is worse," said her sister. "She's been coughing a great deal and she has those pains in her back and chest. I'm — I'm rather glad we're not going out, Anna."

"So am I," said Miss Anna bravely. "But we'll have to put on our hats."

"Where are the opera glasses, Hettie," asked Mrs. Blynn, as they started up the stairs.

"Sedgewick has them, mother," answered her daughter. "Or, at least, he left them at Mrs. DeMille's some time ago. He said he was to get them the next time he went there."

"That was six months ago," murmured Miss Anna, quite inaudibly. Her sister put her finger to her lips and shook her head.

"Well, hurry down, girls. We must not keep him waiting. I've been watching the street cars go by on

the Craven street line. They *seem* to be running all right now."

"Yes, mother."

In sober, almost unbroken silence the three of them came down and sat in the warm little parlor, consciously intent upon every sound that came from the outside. They listened eagerly for the quick footsteps of the youth for whom they waited; they longed for the dash up the chill front steps and the bursting in upon them of the belated loved one, with his instant and vigorous explanation of the wretched delay. With their hats and veils and gloves on and their wraps close at hand they waited in plaintive patience, each certain that he would not come but neither daring to voice the conviction.

The grim old clock in the hall banged the hour of nine. Unconsciously they found themselves hoping that it would stop on the stroke of eight. Oh, if it had only stopped then! But it clanged on and, somehow, it seemed that it meant to strike ten in its cruel irony and then relented before it was too late to recall the stroke. A deep sigh fell from the lips of Mrs. Blynn. She glanced at each of her daughters with a wan, pathetic smile.

Katie, the housemaid, came to the door and in rather subdued tones inquired if Bridget should keep dinner warm for Mr. Sedgewick.

"I suppose he's had his dinner," said Miss Hettie sharply.

"Perhaps not, if he has been delayed on the car line," interposed the mother, still hoping. "Tell her to keep

the steak near the fire, Katie, and be ready to make him some hot coffee."

"Very well, ma'am."

Mrs. Blynn moved her chair to a spot where she could look upon the sidewalk. Miss Hettie had raised the shade some time before. From time to time one or another of them spoke of the act they had missed or repeated some oft-given remark about Sedgewick's non-appearance. Neither of them had a word of criticism to offer; they steadfastly clung to the certainty that he had been unavoidably detained — a discrepancy in Providence, not Sedgewick Blynn.

"The sidewalks are very icy," said Mrs. Blynn, following one of her quick glances down the street.

"It's very cold," said Miss Anna. After a moment's reflection she added: "How I hate to go out on a night like this."

Miss Hettie looked up quickly. "The street cars are always so crowded, and goodness knows how many germs one might get. There's pneumonia, grippe, scarlet fever, and — "

"As if we'd catch scarlet fever at our age," cried Miss Anna, with a well-delivered laugh.

"My dear, it's very serious if one does get it at our age," said Miss Hettie. "Is n't it, mother?"

"It's very serious with children, no matter when they get it," said Mrs. Blynn, trying to fall in with the spirit of the others. "I do hope Sedgewick has n't slipped on the icy pavement and hurt himself in a fall."

"He never slips," said Miss Hettie quietly.

"Does n't he always say that he'll land on his feet, mother?" added Miss Anna airily.

"An accident is an accident, however," said their mother, going to the window for a long, intense look into the gas-lit street. Miss Hettie seized the opportunity to shake her fist at a framed photograph of a bright-faced young man, that stood on the centre table beneath the lamp.

At half-past nine, Mrs. Blynn slowly began to remove the pins from her bonnet, still facing the window with her back to the girls. Her voice trembled ever so slightly as she said:

"I don't believe he is coming, girls. We might as well take off our hats and — go to bed. I am — I am so very sorry, girls, that you could not have gone to-night. You must be terribly disappointed. It is — "

"Tush, mother," cried Miss Hettie quickly.

"I really did not care to go out, my dears. My cold is bothering me and, really, you know, bed is the place for me — with a hot-water bottle. But with you — it's different. You would have loved Miss Barrymore. I — I don't see why — Hettie, perhaps you'd better see if the telephone is out of order. He may have called up and could not get us."

Deliberately, without comment, the three disappointed women removed their hats and gloves. Miss Anna forced a smile of gratification into her face as she gaily tossed her hat upon the table.

"Thank heaven, mother, you're not disappointed; you may be sure I'm not. I've actually been lamenting the fact that I had to go out. Since you don't mind missing the play, I'll confess that I was — well, what Sedgewick calls grouchy about leaving a warm fireside to-night. I would n't have let you know it for the world, though. I'm so interested in this book of Hardy's. You must read it, mother. Goodness, it makes me furious to think of the two hours I've missed this evening. A book beats a play all to pieces."

"Give me Anthony Hope every time," commented Miss Hettie, jerking off her glove. "Mother, shall I take your things up-stairs?"

"Yes, dear. I — I think I'll read awhile myself." They observed the deepening lines at the corners of her mouth; her nether lip quivered for a second before she could reclaim control of it. There was a dull, lifeless look in her faded, sweet old face.

The truth had come home to her.

Miss Hettie scowled fiercely as she hurried up the stairway. Tears rushed to her eyes and her heart was full.

"Don't forget to try the telephone, Hettie," was Mrs. Blynn's quavering injunction.

"All right, mother," came back in subdued tones.

Mrs. Blynn wearily picked up her book from the table and sank into the chair that was always hers. As she adjusted her reading glasses, Miss Anna came over and put an arm about her frail shoulders.

"I'm glad you did n't mind, mother," she said, with the tact of a loving deceiver. "We did n't, I'm sure."

"I thought you'd be bitterly disappointed," murmured the mother gratefully, but she saw through Miss Anna's strategy with eyes that would not be blinded again.

Miss Hettie found them reading quietly by the table when she came jauntily down-stairs, her own book in her hand. If Mrs. Blynn had looked sharply enough she might have seen a queer light in Miss Hettie's eyes. Miss Hettie was about to tell a lie — a white lie, of course — and it was something she was not in the habit of doing.

"The telephone must be out of order, mother," she said, involuntarily blushing as Miss Anna looked up. "I can't get Central."

"Ah, that's it!" cried her mother, her face lighting up instantly. "He could not reach us."

The words were hardly out of her mouth when the telephone bell rang testily, aye, ironically. Miss Hettie gasped and lost her wits completely.

Miss Anna stepped into the breach. "Go and answer it, Hettie. The repairs must have just been completed. Dear me, how those men must suffer who work on the lines such weather as this."

"I will answer it, Hettie," said Mrs. Blynn. "It's Sedgewick and he's been trying to get us all evening." She went up-stairs more quickly than they had seen her move in many months. Breathlessly they listened to her voice as she responded to the speaker at the other end.

When she hung up the receiver and started down-stairs, Miss Hettie whispered her first words of secession:

"I'll bet he's lied to her like a trooper!" Her eyes blazed.

"Be careful, Hettie!"

Mrs. Blynn went to the speaking tube that led to the kitchen before addressing herself to the silent daughters

"Bridget, don't keep Mr. Sedgewick's dinner any longer. He — he has been detained." Then to the girls: "It is as I thought. He has tried to get me five or six times."

A quick, wondering glance sped between Miss Hettie and Miss Anna. It said plainly that they knew she did not believe what he had told her. They did not ask where he was.

CHAPTER III

THE FRIENDSHIP

GEORGE PENNINGTON was a temperamental person — one might say an impressionable one and not be stretching the point. He was forty-five if he was a day, and yet he found himself nourishing a sudden, unusual liking for the gay fledgeling, Sedgewick Blynn, twenty years his junior. He made no doubt that his new-found impressions were due to the fact that the young man had said good-night to his mother and was, according to report, in the habit of doing so, no matter how he was situated. It was his innermost belief that the man who could pay such sweet, gentle homage to the little mother at home could not be, by any manner of means, as selfish and unworthy as the general run of society men as he had come to know them.

He waited two or three days, hearing in the meantime more than one slighting remark concerning the vainglorious pet of society, and then casually asked Blynn to lunch with him at the club. They met in the reading room; Pennington's invitation was well-meant and spontaneous. He really wanted to like the young man; he believed he was worth while and not in a fair way to be spoiled, as most men prophesied.

Sedgewick's wry, apologetic smile was an appeal to the unexpected friendliness of the older man. Pennington's heart grew warmer; in his mind he said that there was something more than lovable in the young man's manner. Blynn's smile was almost his fortune.

"I'd like to, Mr. Pennington, but I've — I've half way promised to lunch with Mr. Ransome. He wants to talk something over with me." Sedgewick was looking grievously disappointed. "I say, would you mind waiting a moment?" he went on earnestly. "I'll telephone to Mr. Ransome and tell him I'll drop in at his office this afternoon. I'd like very much to lunch with you, thank you, if I can arrange it." He hurried off to the telephone booth and called for Mr. Ransome's offices.

Ransome was one of the great financial leaders of the country. His acquaintance with this young sprig of fashion was of the most casual nature. The great man was too busy to go in for society; it was not likely that he should come in contact with its most popular exponent except on occasions when he was obliged to listen to the pleas of committee men who undertook to provide him with boxes for the charity entertainments at five hundred dollars per box, to say nothing of the horse and motor shows, where he might have been seen quite regularly. It would seem that he preferred the society of horses and motors to that of his fellow creatures as represented by the set to which he belonged by virtue of his wife's religious views — which had nothing what-

soever to do with God, but were rather arbitrary in respect to a certain creed.

Over the telephone Mr. Blynn graciously informed Mr. Ransome's secretary that he would personally deliver to the kind gentleman the tickets and reservations for the great charity concert on the 27th, and would do so during the afternoon. He had expected to hand them to Mr. Ransome during luncheon at the club, but as he was lunching himself with some one else he was afraid he might miss him in the rush. In response to which the secretary, perhaps not recognising this as an explanation for Mr. Blynn's inability to lunch with Mr. Ransome, merely replied, "Very well," and hung up the receiver.

But, of course, Mr. Pennington could not have known of the difficulties attending Mr. Blynn's sacrifice on his account. He was only relieved when Blynn returned with a smile on his frank countenance, to announce that he had put the old gentleman off and would be free to lunch with him.

"Are you on the inside with Ransome?" asked Pennington as they waited for the cocktails. "You're a lucky dog if you are."

"Oh, no," said Sedgewick, with becoming candour; "my affairs are too insignificant to interest him. I'm merely a small satellite. I hang on when he is n't looking. He had agreed to take something off my hands, that's all, — just a trifle, you know." It was not necessary to tell Pennington that he was chairman of the box

sale for the charity concert. He was justified in taking it for granted that Pennington had seen that fact displayed in the society columns of the newspapers.

That luncheon was the beginning of an intimacy between the two that amazed and even annoyed the friends of the older man. Not that they could put a finger on any specific reason why it should not exist; they could say nothing when he met their protests with the comfortable assurance that he liked Blynn and that there was a great deal more to him than one might suspect, if judging merely by surface appearances. Blynn had a way of making every one like him, even though there may have been some reason for not admiring him.

He interested and amused Pennington, who was easy-going to the point of carelessness in more ways than one.

Pennington was rich, unselfish, charitable toward the foibles of others and generous with his own. It was like him, as Stanley had said, to take up with a chap like Blynn just for the sake of doing something unusual in a man of forty-five. But strange as it may seem to them, Pennington found real delight in going about with the omnipresent young blade, quite to the exclusion of his older and better friends.

Others may not have grasped the reason for all this; but Pennington remembered that Blynn was in the habit of saying good-night to his mother. Once, in conversation, he mentioned it to the young man; thereafter Sedgewick made splendid capital of his reputation for filial piety. It is only fair to add that he actually

made it a practice to telephone to his mother, thereby setting a fashion among an aping set of young gallants that created no end of wonder and delight for the mothers who found themselves unexpectedly and rather conspicuously remembered.

It is of record that during one of Mrs. Loveless's week-end house-parties up the bay, the telephone tolls amassed by devoted sons amounted to something over two hundred dollars. Everybody said that the world was getting better, and Mrs. Loveless was perfectly content to pay the bill, without noticing how many mothers each of her young men possessed, nor how varied were their abiding places.

Sedgewick Blynn, however, was not a worshipper at the chorus girl shrine.

The first few months of the friendship between George Pennington, clubman and capitalist, and Sedgewick Blynn, broker and sunshine dealer, have little to do with the net results of this tale, except as they had their bearing upon the natural development of certain ideals. Socially they scarcely kept abreast of each other; Blynn went everywhere and travelled the path with energy; while Pennington, caring less for the froth of life as he saw more of it, accepted only such invitations as seemed to promise real diversion. He sat back and watched the progress of his young friend in the conquest of hearts and smiled in true enjoyment of the other's campaigns. Sedgewick was never wholly out of the maelstrom. If Pennington thought at all of the young man's unique

regard for the purely business side of his life, he did not permit it to weigh against him in his estimation. He could not but have recognised the puerile methods which characterised Blynn's operations.

Nor did it weigh against the young man when, from time to time as their friendship grew, he haltingly requested the loan of small sums to lift him over sharp and unexpected chasms. Pennington cheerfully lent him the money; he had been young once himself and had lived beyond his means, with no one to borrow from. And Blynn, notwithstanding his tardiness in returning money borrowed from other and younger companions, was most punctilious in repaying Pennington. All of which held him in great good favour with that excellent friend.

The winter and spring ran into summer and society began to look for its pleasures in the country, at the seashore, in the mountains, and about the northern lakes. Sedgewick was asked everywhere. He was in need of wings or seven-league boots; only the magic tapestry of Scheherazade could have transported him to all of the hostesses who wanted him to come to them. He golfed and motored and sailed over a territory that might well have confounded him had it not been for George Pennington's generosity.

Pennington, the idler, enjoyed his summers; he hated the winters. Blynn was not pecuniarily able to take advantage of all that was offered, a condition that Pennington was not slow to appreciate; it was like him,

therefore, to promote his own enjoyment by playing the fairy prince to the humble knight. He cheerfully insisted on paying all, or nearly all, of the young man's expenses when they ventured out of town together — which was quite often, as they dallied with the same element of the smart set.

It was no unusual thing for Sedgewick to stay for days at a time in Pennington's luxurious apartment, one door removed from the exclusive club of which they were members. He dressed there, and shaved there, and bathed there.

But, once in a while, he went home for a night or two in succession.

"I hate this thing of running away from my mother, George," he once said as they were travelling north to join a big house party in the hills. There was a serious, restless expression in his face. "She's old and she's — well, she's a bit frail, old man. By gad, I'm going to cut it out pretty soon — that is, a good deal of it. I don't see her a tenth as much as I'd like to. She wants me to enjoy every bit of it, you understand. She's the best mother in the world. I'd give my life, my soul for her. And, I say, George, she's just crazy about you. I've told her what a bully chap you are and she's — Oh, well, she's like any mother, I suppose."

Pennington's eyes gleamed with genuine pleasure. Somehow he had come to love this old lady whom he had never seen, to his best recollection. She was like a dream to him — a sweet, restful dream.

"I should like very much to know her," he said warmly. "Of course, I knew your sisters — er — some years ago, but I never had the pleasure of meeting your mother."

"I'd like to have you go out with me and stay over night, George. Mother'd be tickled to death. Your name is a household word, let me tell you."

It is worthy of mention that Pennington, bearing all this in mind, out of the pure joyousness of his heart, sent a huge bunch of roses to Mrs. Blynn immediately upon his return to town, inclosing his card.

"I'll let the dear old lady see that I appreciate being a household word, if nothing else," he said to himself. He had no response from the recipient of this floral attention. Vaguely puzzled, he waited for a fortnight, and then, possessed of a whimsical impulse, motored out to the home in Lombard Avenue. He said nothing to Sedgewick of his intention for the very excellent reason that his young friend was off for a three days' stay with the Carnahans.

He was admitted by Katie, who went to the door in her scrub-clothes, taking it for granted that it was the postman's ring. Mrs. Blynn came down-stairs with a look of polite askance in response to his card.

When he left the house a quarter of an hour later, his own self-esteem and no little portion of his confidence in Sedgewick Blynn were severely stricken. He had discovered almost instantly that his name, far from being a household word, was quite unknown to Mrs. Blynn. She was pleasantly surprised to receive a friend of Sedge-

wick's, and, after a moment's reflection, volunteered her thanks for the roses, admitting that she was sorely puzzled at the time of their arrival and thought there must have been some mistake. Still, there were so few Blynns. He went away half-dazed, and more distressed than he could have imagined.

It had been revealed to him beyond question that Sedgewick had at least exaggerated the attitude of his family toward him; he had never been so uncomfortable in his life; she had graciously asked him to call again when Sedgewick was at home, and perhaps he would better telephone out in advance, as her son was so busy in his office that he seldom came to his home. Besides, she added with a tender smile, he was something of a society man, and went about a great deal in the evening, as doubtless Mr. Pennington would see if he read the paper.

In no little distress of mind, he took Sedgewick to task when that gentleman airily blew in from the country a few days later. Blynn's flush of annoyance was but momentary. He stooped over to adjust the roll of his trousers leg, and Pennington missed the quick gleam of apprehension that sprung into his eyes. An instant later he was facing his friend, a subdued, disturbed look in his face. "Old man," he said, as if with an effort, "it's just as we've all feared. She's older than we've been able to understand, living with her as we do. I've noticed it for some time. George, she's — she's losing her memory. You know what that means. Senility,

second childhood — Good Lord, you don't know how it's been worrying me. Her mind retains nothing — or practically nothing that bears on recent or current events. She talks of her childhood adventures and all that. You understand, don't you? It's worse than I thought. She's heard us speak of you a thousand times. I tell you, old man, it's hard to bear." He got up and went over to the window. Pennington could see his figure grow taut with emotion, and his heart warmed again to the young man.

Sedgewick Blynn was saying to himself that he would have to begin at once on the belated task of making Pennington's name a "household word." He felt no compunction whatsoever in describing his mother as in the first steps of feeble-mindedness; it was an inspired means of absolution.

"I'll send her roses every day, my boy, if you say it is only the immediate present that interests her," said Pennington huskily. "Let her forget them the next day, if God wills, but they will make her happy for the moment."

"Thanks, old man. You're a true nobleman. *I'll* not forget it, rest assured. Now, if you don't mind, I'll beg off on that little dinner to-night and go out to see her instead. You won't mind?"

For the next week, little was seen of Sedgewick Blynn in his old haunts or in the homes of such friends as remained in town. He declined a dozen invitations; every one was aware of the fact that he was "staying home" because his mother was not quite so well as usual. His

sisters were secretly apprehensive. They wondered how large his bills were that his mother, sooner or later, would volunteer to pay. Incidentally, they were hearing a great deal about the wonderful George Pennington. It was easily impressed upon them that his daily roses were a most distinguished tribute to his dearest friend. To their amazement, however, Sedgewick had no bills that required instant attention.

Pretty Miss Carnahan, now desperately in love with Blynn, spent an uneasy but somewhat exalted week. Other fair ladies may have been just as uneasy, but they were not in a position to complain, even to themselves. This particular *debutante* had come to regard herself as the chosen one among all the ladies at Sedgewick's court; he plainly had given her to understand as much. Tentatively, they were engaged. She was too young to realise that becoming engaged is no longer regarded as a serious or even a permanent affection of the heart; expert love-doctors make light of it, in fact. They have come to treat it as a rash, so to speak. But it is quite contagious among otherwise normally healthy members of society.

Her exaltation was due to the cause which kept him away from her for a whole unhappy week — his perfectly adorable consideration for his mother. She had returned to town for a fortnight, solely to be near him, but she made herself believe that it was a joy to sacrifice herself to a cause so noble. It was, of course, not beyond Bessie Carnahan to be jealous; she had lost no little sleep over his care-free wanderings into other fields.

It was quite easy for her to hate Beatrice Gray, who had been out a year longer than herself, and to whom Sedgewick paid unmistakable homage between times, as it were.

Miss Carnahan, putting it bluntly to herself, made not the slightest doubt that they were quite deep in a flirtation. Nor was Miss Gray the only young lady to whom he was conspicuously agreeable. Moreover, she had reason to resent his attentions to certain young and charming married women of the smart set. There had been queer things said of his goings-on with Mrs. Fielding;' and then there was blond, airy Mrs. Thorp who had virtually introduced him to the exclusive set. They were surely to be taken into consideration by a tentatively engaged girl. Besides, people were beginning to link his name with that of Mrs. Johnny Gordon, George Pennington's young married sister. They, too, were seen together very often of late, and usually without Johnny on hand as a counter-balance. Mrs. Gordon was very pretty and very smart and altogether very much worth while.

Before the end of her first week in town, Miss Carnahan found herself prey to a dozen different and equally dismal doubts, each doubt being comprehensive of a separate and distinct member of her own sex.

He telephoned to her frequently, but it was not until the second week of her stay that he professed a willingness to leave his mother. He came to see Bessie one

evening. She was full of her doubts and misgivings, and she was young enough to be eager to set them at rest without delay or diplomacy.

They sat in the narrow, vine-screened balcony which opened from the hall up-stairs and looked down upon the avenue with a cool, aloof exclusiveness that defended it from the stare of the curious, who, it seems, have eyes for nothing but the palatial. The buzz of the night came up to them, laden with sounds near and afar, sounds unheeded, unnoticed, yet forever dinning in the senseless ears of the Babel-dwellers. He gently caressed the slim hand of the girl; twice he had kissed it tenderly. Something in his manner told her that he was depressed, even disturbed over the condition of his mother. A new and sweeter tone vibrated in his voice when he spoke of her; the week had been one of rare joy and contentment to her, and he could never forget that he was in a measure responsible. The vain girl's heart warmed itself once more before the fires of its own sacrifice.

Sedgewick could not tell her, of course, that a large part of his depression was due to the kindly though rather imperative warning that his best friend had given him earlier in the evening. Pennington had advised him to choose between Miss Carnahan and Miss Gray, or cease his attentions to both.

"People are bound to give you the devil if you keep on trifling with the one you don't intend to marry," he had said, rather seriously.

"But suppose that I don't intend to marry either of them," was Sedgewick's reply, a trace of defiance in his voice.

"Then people will be quite right in giving you the devil, my boy," replied the other, after a long look into the young man's eyes. "Moreover, I 'd give up running after Mrs. Fielding. It does n't matter just now, perhaps, but if some of these other women take it into their heads to pay you off one way or another, you 'll come a hard cropper. You can't play with two fires at the same time, Sedge. One of them is bound to burn out. Forgive me for speaking quite plainly, but I 'm older than you, and I 've seen other men playing with fire. It does n't pay."

"I don't have anything to do with chorus girls and that sort, George. By gad, I 'm doing nothing wrong," he exclaimed resentfully.

"My dear boy, don't try to convince yourself that all the wrong in the world lies in the chorus girl."

"I 'm not saying anything against 'em."

"Well, it does n't matter," said the other, with a friendly smile. "I hope you won't take what I 've said amiss. You 're popular, you 're a favourite everywhere. Every one likes you and — "

"Oh, not every one," muttered Blynn.

"— you can't afford to jeopardise this good opinion. I don't know whether you can afford to marry, but I 'm quite sure that you 're good enough for any one of the girls. You 'd make your way without their money."

Blynn gave him a quick look and then his face lightened perceptibly. "But, Sedge, don't get a reputation for being a flirt, a trifler. It 's hard to live down — even after you are married; and, more than all this, don't put yourself in the position of having your motives questioned. Don't do anything to jeopardise the good name of any young and foolish — er — married woman."

With this he turned away to relight his cigar. Blynn looked at his back for an instant, the red flush of resentment leaping to his cheeks. Then a sudden pallor crept up to replace the flame; his eyes grew wide and then narrowed in the eager intent to read the other's mind. A chill swept over him, his fingers moved restlessly; a feeling of apprehension that became almost a conviction seized upon him. Did Pennington mean — but no, he could not suspect anything like that! That would be too bad! It would mean the beginning of the end, and, after all, Sedgewick Blynn was a special kind of coward: he was afraid of the unspoken reproach. No, he said to himself, even as his heart stood still with strange alarm, Pennington could not have had that in mind when he so coolly warned him against jeopardising — Good Lord, he could not have heard anything like that! Why, he would be the last man to hear gossip of that sort!

His hand shook as he flecked the ash from his cigarette. He cast two furtive glances at his now silent friend, one of doubt, the other of decision. In that

instant he made up his mind to take no chances against losing this man's friendship. There was too much at stake. It was not too late. He had come to recognise the peril in ample time to avoid the catastrophe.

"Thanks, old man," he said, and his voice was husky with an emotion which the other man misinterpreted. "You are always right. I never realised what it might mean — this frivoling of mine."

"You take it in good heart, Sedge?" asked the older man wistfully.

"Certainly. And, truly, I am much obliged. It's damn good of you to talk to me as you have."

Ten minutes later he was in the telephone booth down-stairs talking with Mrs. Johnny Gordon, explaining in a hurried sort of way that it would be impossible for him to keep his engagement to come to her little Bridge party that evening. She did not play, and he had promised to amuse her while the others fought in secret wrath over the card tables. She pleaded and stormed and pouted, but he was firm; he was sorry, but something unexpected had turned up. He hung up the receiver with a sigh — a sigh that was almost pathetic in its renunciation.

"I hated to do that," he said to himself, over and over again. He still remained in the booth, debating a question that now seemed to be forcing itself upon him. At last, he sighed again and took down the receiver. He was convincing himself in that instant that he had decided the question, "for good and all."

He called up the Carnahan home and asked Bessie if he might come over, in the event that she expected to be quite alone. It had required some strength of purpose on his part to decide whether to call up Miss Carnahan, Miss Gray, or the one he had carried over from the previous season, Miss Elsmore.

CHAPTER IV

COMPOSITE HEROISM

IT was his policy to belittle himself to Miss Carnahan, confident that she felt she knew him well enough to resent the all but heroic self-abasement.

"My dear," he said to her lightly, after he had played with her emotions for half an hour or more, "you should n't love me, — you really should not. I 'm scandalously heartless, and you are nothing but heart. We 'd make a sorry combination. You 'd find me out in a little while, and — well, I shudder to think of what *you 'd* think." He lighted his fifth cigarette and smiled his most alluring smile.

She laughed in ruthless response to his mood. "You would find me out, too, at the same time. I don't believe I 'll ever get over being a fool — about you." She added the last words with a soft break in her voice that moved him in spite of his arrant conceitedness.

"That 's just it, dear," he said, with quaint despair. "That 's just what people would be calling you if you married me."

"Nonsense!" she cried, resentful at the mere thought of it.

"But I love you — I do love you!" he burst forth intensely. That was enough. No one could say it as he did; no one could have so thrilled her with those oft-repeated words. She was young, but she was not without experience. Other youths had told her as much as he, but, ah, there was such a difference! She had not yet got beyond the stage when she must catch her breath and tremble every time he uttered the magic cry.

After many minutes she drew away, faint with exaltation, yet possessed of an ever-recurring sense of guilt and apprehension. In all the weeks of their fervid love-making, she had never been quite free from this strange feeling of restraint; it always came, with subtle insistence, at the very instant when she felt herself being carried completely away by his impelling ardour. She did not know it then, but it was the real woman revolting against the thing that was not real. Something within her reasoned, and she was shamed without knowing why. If it had been the true, undying love that spent itself in these manifestations, her timid womanhood would not have shrunk back into itself at such moments as these. This was but the passing of a restless young dream in which she was half awake all the time.

Sedgewick Blynn had uttered the same words to other girls in the same fervent way. But he was always able to convince himself that he meant them.

"Sedgewick. dear, I wonder — " she hesitated, a per

plexed look in her dark eyes — "I wonder if you really love me better than all else in the world." There was a pleading, uncertain quaver in her voice.

He looked properly aggrieved. "Bessie, darling, why do you say that? Do you — can you doubt me? Good heaven, I 'm — I 'm mad about you. I know I 'm not worthy of your love, dearest, but — Oh, you must believe that I 'd give my whole life to possess and cherish it."

She looked at him steadily, the strange doubt still lingering in her mind. "Oh, I *do* hope you have never said that to any other girl," she whispered.

"To — any — other — girl!" he ejaculated in fine horror. "My soul, what do you think I am?"

She dissolved. "Don't — please don't be angry, Sedgewick. I 'm so — yes, I *am* so jealous. I can't bear the thought of — of — "

"Of what, dearest?" he asked, patting her hand consolingly.

"Well, that you may be interested in Beatrice Gray. Now, don't laugh at me. I can't help it. Every one says you are devoted to her. They come to me with it just because they want to say something hateful. I know you like her. But I — I hate her!"

"Dear me!" he scoffed gently. "You almost convince me that Beatrice is really interested in me. She *is* pretty, you 'll admit."

"Don't be mean! You 're just saying that to irritate me. You can be so hateful, Sedgewick."

He realised more than ever how young she was.

"Dear little girl, you 'll be very unhappy, and you 'll grow old and get wrinkles before your time if you let jealousy get hold of you. It 's an awful trouble. Girls get green all over and — "

"They don't! They get blue all over. Tell me, right now, Sedgewick Blynn, are you ever going to have anything more to do with Beatrice Gray? I *must* know." She resisted his attempt to take her in his arms. "You 've just got to choose between us!"

He turned very serious. "You hurt me more than you can possibly know," he said. "I have told you I love only you. You doubt me. I can't do any more than repeat that I love you. If you really care for me you will not doubt that love. You will not take it out on poor Beatrice Gray, who is nothing to me — she 's a good friend and a good sort, and you don't mean what you say about her. When I tell you that I love you better than my life, that ought to prove to you that I have chosen, if such a thing as choosing is necessary."

"Forgive me, dearest. I 'm a cat — a little beast of a cat."

"Don't cry, darling. There, now! We 'll forget what 's happened. It 's better to quarrel before we 're married than after." For a long time they were silent. He was turning something over in his active brain. "I wonder what your father will say when I ask him for you."

"He 'll do anything I wish," she said confidently.

She always had had everything she wanted, so why not a husband of her own choosing?

"But you are so young."

"Not so young as I was last fall, when I came out," she said wisely. "Dear me, I 'll never forget how sleepy I used to be when I went to the theatre, or when people called and stayed after my old bedtime. But now I can stay up all night. I never want to sleep, except at breakfast time. But, papa will understand."

"I 'm not so sure of that."

"Besides, I don't want to be married for a couple of years," she went on serenely. "I *must* have at least two seasons as Miss Carnahan. So, you see, we won't have to say anything to father just yet."

He looked at her with a curious chill in his heart. To himself he said: "You little wretch! If I give you two years you 'll have forgotten me completely. I know girls too well." Aloud he said: "I don't like the idea of keeping it a secret. I 'm honest, and I don't think it 's right to do anything in the dark. Your father must be told, if it 's to be a real engagement."

She looked thoughtful for a moment, and then said, quite frankly: "But it would n't be wise, Sedgewick. Papa likes you, but he — well, he is n't quite satisfied with your business prospects. Don't scowl so! He 'll think differently, I know. I know you 'll succeed, and you 'll be a great man. You can't help it. But these old men can't understand that it takes time. They are

so foolish about it. Papa 's one of them and he 's — he 's rather set in his ways. Don't you think it would be wise to wait a — just a little while? It might spoil everything to ask him now."

Sedgewick felt something come into his throat and stick. He knew that James Carnahan was not the man to allow his daughter to throw herself away, and he knew, even better than she, that it would be suicidal to speak to him at all. He realised that he had but one chance to win her for his wife. He would have to induce her to consent to an elopement before the glamour wore off of the adventure.

"Of course, dear one, it is for you to say. I can't do anything without your consent. I don't like it, understand. I want you now — as soon as possible. I don't want to wait and I don't want to hold you to a secret pledge. I — I shall tell my mother, of course. You see, I 'm used to going to her with everything. That 's why I wanted to speak to your father at once, I suppose. Am I too old-fashioned and silly?"

"You 're the dearest thing in the world! How proud your mother must be of you."

Half an hour later, she found herself unable to resist the impulse to dig into his friendship for Mrs. Fielding and Mrs. Thorpe and, last of all, Mrs. Johnny Gordon. He pooh-poohed all that she charged in her semi-playful way.

"But Mrs. Johnny Gordon! She is so pretty and so wonderfully clever. I am really afraid of her. And

you are such a great friend of her brother, George Pennington. You must see a great deal of her."

"I have n't seen her in weeks, my dear, so there. We 're friends on George's account. Now, are you done with teasing me?"

The telephone bell rang at that instant. There was a wall 'phone in the hallway just inside the balcony door. The girl flew to it with the briefest, most incontinent apology. Where he sat, he could distinctly hear her part of the conversation. It was not long before the identity of the faraway talker was revealed to him. He felt himself grow red and white by turns; a bleak smile of self-commiseration flitted across his face, and then his mind began to work rapidly in the effort to build up a defence.

The person at the other end of the wire was George Pennington's sister, Mrs. Johnny Gordon.

One sentence uttered by Miss Carnahan, in a rather flustered treble, was sufficient to destroy all hope of tranquillity for him. Under his breath he said: "That damned little cat!" He did not refer to Miss Carnahan.

The girl was saying: "It 's awfully sweet of you, Mrs. Gordon, but really it 's too late. I should *so* like to come over for the supper. You 're too dear for anything. I 'll tell Mr. Blynn that you wanted him, too. Perhaps he 'd like to come over any way. . . . No, his mother is very much better. . . . I think he 's staying at the club to-night." She called out to Sedgewick: "Are n't you, Mr. Blynn?"



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"For a long time they were silent"

"Who is it?" asked Mr. Blynn, affecting a splendid ignorance.

"He says he 's awfully sorry," she said into the transmitter, fibbing blithely. "He 's going out to his mother's when he leaves here."

Sedgewick felt more uncomfortable than before. There was a spitefulness in her voice that he did not like.

"Is it Mrs. Gordon? Tell her that I promised my mother that I 'd — "

But she was chattering on glibly: "Yes, he 's very devoted to her. . . . You saw him at luncheon? . . . Oh! . . . Yes, he does play rather a good game. . . . I see. . . . Yes, I think he did say that he 'd dined at your house last night. . . . Well, good-night. So sorry I can't come over. I 'll tell him."

She hung up the receiver and returned to the balcony.

"I wish she 'd let me alone," he blurted out irascibly, suddenly deciding on a mode of action. "She 's nice and all that, but, hang it all, a fellow gets tired of being dragged into all sorts of things at her house just because Johnny 's got to have some one to play Bridge with him all the time."

The girl looked at him quietly for a moment, a cool smile on her lips. "Don't you want to go over there now? It 's only ten o'clock."

"No, of course not," he exploded. "I 'm where I want to be. She pursues me like a hawk. It 's awful! If it were not for George Pennington I 'd tell her plainly that I don't want to be bothered by — "

"Listen, Sedgewick; are you having an — an affair with her?"

"Lord, no! You can't call it that. That 's putting it too strongly. She 's devoted to her husband — "

"I know. But that does n't prevent you from being devoted to her."

"Don't be silly, dear. She 's all right. She 's always rushing some fellow, don't you know? But it 's perfectly harmless."

"You were there last night."

"For a few minutes. I 'd forgotten it. George and I stopped in on our way down from the Country Club."

"She said she had n't seen her brother in a week."

"Pooh! She 's dreaming," he said easily.

"You 'd better go over to her place," she insisted stubbornly. "You 'll have a much better time there than here. Besides, I 'm going to bed before long."

"If you mean that you want me to leave, I 'll go, Bessie," he said stiffly, arising from his chair. "But I shall not go over to Mrs. Gordon's. I 'm not going to be dragged around by her any more, let me tell you that. I 'm sick of her — plain sick. Good-night!"

She detained him with a quick gesture. "Are you angry? I was hateful. Don't go — please! I know she 's been running after you abominably, and you 've tried to keep me from finding it out. After all, it was the manly thing to do. Sit down, dear. I did n't mean to be so horrid."

He sat down, triumphant. After he left her at mid-

night, she went to bed to lie awake and wonder for hours if anything in the world could be more *delicious* than his pretty picture of an elopement. Of course, she knew that he was jesting, but, oh, how dear it would be if they could only *dare* attempt it all in "real earnest."

To himself he was arguing: "I 've got to do it pretty soon, or it will all go up in smoke. The old man would n't pick me as a son-in-law — not in a thousand years. It 's up to me to pick him as a father-in-law, but I 've got to do it when he is n't expecting it. By Jove, I believe she 'll do it, too!" Again he reflected: "I 'll have to call that woman down, good and hard. She called up the house, just to find out if I was there. She 's a damned cat. I would n't have believed it, either."

It was quite late when he dropped from a street car and turned into the street where George Pennington lived. He was going up to sleep in his rooms. The little side street was very dark and entirely deserted, except for a man who walked in the same direction half a block ahead. Suddenly Blynn's attention was attracted by something that caused him to stare hard down the street.

The figure ahead had been joined by several men, shadowy forms that seemed to come up out of the sidewalk and blend into one solid mass at the mouth of the alley. There was something so sinister about it all that he instinctively felt the clutch of tragedy at his throat. An instant later he was clearly cognizant of the fact

that he was actually witnessing the thing he had read about and dreaded for years — a hold-up!

His fellow night-farer was being robbed within a block of the brilliant boulevard — almost under the the eaves of the big hotels and clubs that lined the way beyond. There was no mistaking the situation; it was all very clear to him. He heard the sound of a blow; then a stifled groan came to his ears.

Sedgewick Blynn was a moral but not a physical coward. He was strong and he was full of the spirit that makes heroes of untried men. It was enough for him that a defenceless man was being beset by vicious cowards, armed and prepared for the encounter. A thrill of wild exhilaration shot through him. With a shout of encouragement, he dashed forward and, almost before the assailants were aware of his presence in the street, he was upon them.

A man, the victim, was standing with his back to the wall, his hands uplifted. Even in his excitement, Blynn could see that his long frame tottered, and something told him that blood was streaming down his face.

One of the three assailants turned and fired point blank at the newcomer. Blynn afterwards avowed, and with truth, that he heard the bullet as it whizzed past his head. His heavy walking stick swung squarely upon the fellow's head and he went down with a groan. Still shouting for help, Sedgewick hurled himself upon the nearest ruffian, striking wildly with his fists. The third man darted up the alley, and a second later fired reck-

lessly toward the struggling group, for their victim had joined Blynn in the attack. The man with whom they engaged had no time to draw his revolver from the pocket to which it had been restored while he searched the person of their prey. He fought fiercely with his hands and feet and gave as good as he received.

The rush of footsteps down the street came to their ears. Blynn, taking a savage blow in the face, clinched with the desperado, clasping his arms about him in such a way as to frustrate his efforts to reach his revolver. As they swayed backward and forward, gasping and cursing, the street seemed to fill with rushing men. Almost before they knew that help was at hand, they were torn apart and a crowd of men surrounded them. Policemen came quickly at the heels of the cabmen who had been first to the rescue. There were shrill whistles, loud shouts, and then Blynn found himself being led away with the two thugs and their staggering victim. He was dizzy and there was a frightful pain in his head.

"Let go of me!" he cried angrily to the officer who supported him. "I 'm no thief!"

"We 'll wait and find out," was the sententious remark of the burly bluecoat.

Later, the two desperadoes were taken off in the patrol wagon. It was then that Blynn made his way through the excited crowd to the side of the man who had been held up. He wiped the blood from his own face, great clots of it. His eye was swollen shut by this time, and his knee was stiff and sore from the vicious

kick it had received. Two men were trying to take the stranger into the club, but he was holding back, exclaiming that he must see his rescuer.

"Great Scott!" shouted Blynn, stopping short as he came up with the blood-covered objector. "Pennington!"

"Blynn!"

Together they were taken into the club house by attendants, talking wildly all the while in their amazement. Neither was badly hurt. While they were being bathed and cared for by the attendants, pending the arrival of the surgeon, they went over the experience with all the eagerness of excited boys, pounding each other on the back or shaking hands by turn, neither quite clear in his mind as to the reality of the situation.

While the surgeon was closing the ugly cut in Pennington's head, that gentleman was drowsily observing to his valiant young friend, on whose bandaged eye reposed a beefsteak from the culinary regions below:

"Sedge, you were a damn fool for taking the chance you did, but it was the bravest thing I 've ever known. You deserve a halo, my boy!"

Sedgewick groaned disconsolately. "It would n't fit, old man. Look at this lopsided head of mine!"

"I said that you deserved it. I did n't say that you 'd ever get it. A fellow never gets what 's coming to him in the way of haloes. But, if I live to be a thousand years old, my boy, I 'll not forget that I owe you one, just the same." He said it with such sincere feeling

that Blynn experienced an almost unholy glow of satisfaction.

"I did it for the sheer joy of the thing, George," he protested, and he was quite honest in saying so. "It was a bully diversion. It 's been damned dull in town for the past few weeks. I needed the exercise."

"Be that as it may, it 's more than probable that you saved my life. No telling what they might have done to me. I 'll not forget it, old fellow."

"I 'd have done the same for the lowliest bum on the streets," went on Sedgewick. "To be perfectly candid, as I look back on it, I don't understand how I happened to have the pluck to take a hand in the affair. I did n't know that I had so much nerve."

"Take my advice: don't do it again," said Pennington. "A bullet is a sure cure for courage. You came near to getting your medicine, too."

They were closer and better friends than ever. Pennington never tired of paying tribute to this new and almost sensational quality that had cropped out in the make-up of the young trifler. The city rang with stories of his courage; he took on a fresh atmosphere of interest; his world loved a hero quite as much as it loved a lover.

For nine days Blynn was the most talked-of and the most talked-to young man in the city. Worshippers of the opposite sex fairly deluged him with attentions. He had the good sense to accept adulation with a quaint modesty that made his achievements stand out more boldly by contrast.

Bessie Carnahan was quite ready to run away with him at any time, and she was not alone in that respect.

Before the end of a week, Pennington had bought from his friend something like a hundred thousand shares in the vague copper mining bonanza he was promoting in behalf of a newly organised company that promised much for little. Also, the accommodating Mr. Blynn managed to "let him in" on several fine tips from the stock exchange.

It is worthy of note that Sedgewick Blynn suddenly paid up all of his bills about town, and re-established his credit by showing a neat balance in the banks. He lived hard on easy money, and his conscience gave him no manner of uneasiness.

Pennington was rich and was able to take his losses with a sturdy indifference that surprised even the optimistic Blynn, who heroically undertook to shoulder the blame for having drawn him into certain unfortunate speculations. He openly deplored the fact that he had already spent his own miserable commission.

CHAPTER V

A WEEK-END

HIS rather imposing summer drew toward an end. Week-end jaunts to the country places were fewer; people were beginning to straggle back to the city from all parts of the big world. He had lived off the fat of his adventure with the bandits; he had prospered snugly in the traffic for which he was best qualified, — pleasure. Every one had been nicer to him than ever before; thus he throve on kindness and the warm things of life. He was not the kind who would endure the cold, nor could he bear the vista when it is bleak and grey. Rose-tinted glasses were constantly between him and his view of life, and with rose-tinted glasses one may always temper the ugliness that abounds.

The affair with Miss Carnahan had reached the acute stage. Plans for an elopement had passed the point where they ceased to be trivial and infantile. The spoiled, vain, headstrong girl was easily moved by the romantic picture he knew so well how to draw. She reveled in the prospect of a real love match; her little soul was full of silly cravings for an adventurous honeymoon. To run away with the most popular beau in town! To be published broadcast as the beautiful

heroine of a real love story! To be the one person most talked about during the season to come! It would be much nicer than getting married at home; for it is quite certain that she had no doubts as to the tractability of her parent, even though he may have been opposed to Sedgewick Blynn from the beginning. Sedgewick was not slow to take advantage of this romantic, though somewhat petulant, way of looking at a situation which he understood much better than she.

He realised that a secret marriage was the *only* one in which he could participate if he aimed so high as this.

Still, he found it very hard to forget the soft blue eyes and piquant face of Beatrice Gray. She was a dear! And she loved him, he knew. Alas, how bitterly inadequate is the law of choice: Beatrice Gray was quite as poor as Bessie was rich. He easily persuaded himself into believing that there was no real peril in seeing Beatrice quite frequently, in a way; he was perfectly sure of himself; besides, she would get over it as all girls do. What if she did seem to resent his friendship for Bessie Carnahan? It was quite natural that she should be jealous. A young girl's prerogative! Pooh!

Bessie Carnahan refused point blank to run away with him until everybody was back in town for the season. That meant November. So it was decided that the flight should not be taken until just before the Charity Ball, a most propitious period in the season's calendar.

Accordingly he laid his plans. Pennington took on a

fresh block of stock in a Southern railway project, and two of his friends followed his example without consulting him beforehand. Sedgewick coolly set aside the bulk of his commissions for the great day to come. Business was picking up, he told his mother and sisters.

To their amazement and joy, he paid the doctor's account and gave his mother a hundred-dollar bill besides. The old lady was pleased beyond reason. She confidently proclaimed to the sisters that he was just beginning to show what he really was made of. "From now on," was her serene declaration. She knew that in time he would repay all of the money he had borrowed from her for his business. They would not have to skimp to make both ends meet as they had been doing for the past six months. No; she had not cast her bread upon still waters. It would be driven back to her by the tide of fortune. The few thousands he had invested for her, on the advice of that astute financier, James Carnahan, would bring back a harvest of golden fruit. Ah, how good it was that her son could go to the great James Carnahan for counsel and advice!

The old lady was failing in health — so rapidly that even Sedgewick could see the changes when he made his brief, infrequent visits to the place in Lombard Avenue. She had a cough, and there was a frail look about her that shocked him more and more as the weeks went by. Somehow she clung to him with a firmer clasp as her hands lost their vigour and strength. He could feel something new and strange and pitiful in the

touch of her hand, in the sweep of her lips, in the caress of her glance. There was dawning upon him that which had long been known to his sisters: she was nearing the end.

He humbly accepted the mild advice of the elder sister and began to spend more of his nights at home. Somehow, in his heart, he was afraid of what was coming to them. He told Pennington. Pennington put a hand upon his shoulder and said simply:

"I shall never forget when it happened to me, Sedgewick. I loved my mother, just as you love yours. Stick by her these days, my boy. You 'll feel happier when it 's all over if you do."

Money matters grew worse at the Blynn home, but the old lady was imperative in her commands that nothing should be said about them to Sedgewick. She would not have him worried and harassed now that he was on the very point of bounding upward to success. The least discouragement, she maintained, might cause him to falter; his father always had said that he would have been a millionaire if he had not been broken in the start. The bank account had dwindled to almost nothing; there was little or no income from the investments that Sedgewick had made; the dividends that once had come to them from good securities seemed now to have ceased altogether. The old lady would not have him to know that she had sacrificed practically all of the good investments in order to fall in with his splendid schemes for advancement. It is doubtful

if this sanguine, calloused young financier ever sensed the fact that he was wiping out the means of sustenance upon which his mother and sisters were dependent. He gave no thought to figures; he was not one to consider limitations.

One day Mrs. Blynn, whose trembling fingers had gone over the waning figures a hundred times in these latter months, calmly announced to her daughters that she was going "over town" to consult with Mr. Carnahan about the investments which her son had made through him.

"He was a very great friend of your father's, my dears," she announced, "and I am sure he will give me a little of his time, for his sake, if no other. Don't argue, Hettie. I am going. I must see just what he thinks of the investments as they are to-day. No doubt they were good when he advised Sedgewick to put the money into them, but — but one can never tell what may happen in the stock market. Don't say anything to Sedgewick. It would annoy him terribly if he knew that I had done such a thing. He'd — he'd think I did not believe in him."

And so the mother of Sedgewick Blynn went to the offices of the great James Carnahan to ask about the few paltry, miserable thousands that had been introduced into the august company of millions! Colonel Carnahan received her as he should have received the widow of a dear and old-time friend. She had not been mistaken in predicting the welcome beforehand.

The old lady scarcely had begun her timid, faltering remarks, when he suddenly interrupted her to ask his secretary and his stenographer to withdraw from the room. He closed the door after them himself. Then he heard what she had to say of the investments Sedgewick had made at his suggestion!

. . . . . .

October saw Sedgewick rampant in multiplying duties; he was manager of the open-air horse show, director of the tennis tourney, ringmaster in the amateur circus, and chairman of the board of governors for the Rose Cotillion — the smartest ball of each succeeding season. If he noted the alarming progress of his mother's illness, he lost sight of it readily in contemplation of the renewed social activities, to say nothing of a certain stupendous affair of his own.

Next-door neighbour to the Blynns in Lombard Avenue lived a Mr. Thomas O'Brien, one time assistant to Sedgewick's father, now a rheumatic invalid of slender means and wide philosophy. The Blynns and the O'Briens were friendly neighbours of long standing. Kate O'Brien, on whom poverty sat lightly, for she had never known affluence, was now the sole support of the invalid father. She was a pretty girl of twenty-five or thereabouts, quick-witted, resourceful, and not ashamed to wear the harness that chafes the sons of Martha. Since early girlhood she had toiled with the army of shop-girls who daily stream into and out of the vast recesses of trade, cheerfully battling her way up through the thorniest paths until

to-day she was an autocrat where real autocrats abound — in the dressmaking department of a huge and fashionable shop known to all the world of woman. An autocrat was she, for she was now the head of that department, and what woman is there who can or will dispute the claim I make?

Big hearted, tender, and thoughtful was this fine Irish girl who dealt serenely with the great ladies of the land and yet ate her lunch with the lowliest spinner in that castle of avarice. She earned big wages but she put on no airs; she was one of a huge army and she lived in the camps that fortune had pitched for them all. What was good for them was also good enough for her.

Back in the tender days of childhood she had come to look upon Sedgewick Blynn as her lord and knight. Time and opportunity had taken him to a higher plane. She remained where she was, content with her lot, while the boyish sweetheart soared far beyond her small horizon into a world which she could never hope to see or touch.

But now, in these closing days of summer, when he was more often at home than before, she saw him again with almost daily regularity. Indeed, of late, it was no uncommon thing for them to catch the same street car to the city on the mornings when he was at home. Sedgewick Blynn realised that he was miles above her in the social strata, but he was not above admiring the beauty, and wit, and personal charm of his old-time comrade, her position notwithstanding. For, after all, was she not rather a noted beauty, even in the eyes of those

friends of his? A bit too dashing, perhaps, and a shade too striking in voice and manner, with a laugh that was vulgarly merry, she was, one might say, good form in a sense and very bad form in another.

Sedgewick found no little pleasure in sitting with her on these street car journeys, but he was quite careful to get off the car a block or two before her corner was reached in the down-town district. It would never do to be seen with the head dressmaker at Swan's. Perhaps she understood why it was that he got off the car at one corner when he should have gone on to the next; but if she did, she had the tact to make no comment either to him or to herself. She went sunnily along her way, avoiding the shadows and looking no higher than the hedge that lined her narrow lane. She understood quite well that this young sprig of gentility could not afford to be seen with her, and, by quite another token, she realised that she could not afford to be seen with him. The situation balanced quite nicely, even though the conditions were not weighed in the same scales.

There may have been times when it occurred to Sedgewick Blynn that he was somewhat of a prig; but, after all, wise as she was, she was a shop-girl and — well, he had made it a point to be circumspect in regard to chorus girls and shop-girls, though why he should put them in the same category he never stopped to inquire.

At any rate, he felt warmly toward this genuinely fine friend; down in his heart there was an esteem for her that he could never have recognised as springing from

him if it had suddenly made itself actually manifest. He only knew that she was a good sort, a jolly girl, an intimate scoffer, and, moreover, a devoted, life-long friend to his mother. And so, he was content to ride down-town with his next-door neighbour, deriving no end of pleasure in recounting to her the doings of the select upper world. She was properly impressed by the part he played in all that the smart set undertook. It delighted him to find that she saw him in the light he loved so well. Strangely enough, Kate O'Brien did not think of him as a prig, even though he got off the car at the corner above.

But the clouds were beginning to form beyond Sedgewick Blynn's horizon; they were little clouds, but they were coming up swiftly on the wings of disaster and he was ill-prepared for the storm.

George Pennington's friends were beginning to trouble themselves about his affairs, slyly at first but more persistently as the feeling developed that he was being imposed upon by Sedgewick Blynn. Blynn's transactions had been uniformly disastrous, and there was a well-defined impression that he had deliberately bilked his friend. Pennington calmly laughed at the warnings and informed his friends that he quite well knew where he stood.

The ugly stories spread from the club into the city with sly insistence; it was not long before every one was saying hard things behind the back of Sedgewick Blynn.

Moreover, he was paying the penalty imposed by

women scorned. Mrs. Johnny Gordon was one of the first to "turn up her nose" when his name was mentioned in her hearing. Mrs. Thorpe, who had set him down in the charmed circle, long had been given to spiteful sarcasm, and the unconventional Mrs. Fielding did not mince matters in expressing her views of cads as she found them. Altogether, Sedgewick's star was on the wane, if one looked at it from a general and not a specified point of view.

George Pennington's sister at last spoke plainly to her brother. She told him that Blynn was systematically swindling him.

"Everybody says so, George, so there must be something in it. You know you are such a careless creature when it comes to money matters. He takes advantage of your friendship, George, and he's actually living off of what you drop into those brainless schemes of his. It's rotten low, George, — worse than thievery. I have some respect for a thief, but for a man like Sedgewick Blynn — bah, how I detest a cheat!"

Pennington smiled gravely. They were sitting on the balcony of the Gordon home, awaiting the "Bridgers" who were coming in after dinner, whereupon Pennington was to depart. He would not play Bridge for the excellent reason that the habit was bound to draw him into contact with that hopeless and multitudinous class of humanity which plays the game for prizes and not for profit — the class which laughs when it revokes.

"My dear Judith," he answered, "I thought you

seemed to be very much attached to Sedgewick a month or two back. Why this sudden aversion?"

She met his gaze steadily. "I was fond of him, George. He amused me and I had not yet heard these tales about his dealings with you. I'll confess to his courage, if that's what you are banking on. He's proved himself — physically. I've had him here frequently and made a good deal of him, as you know. Suddenly he began to treat us as if we were clods in his path. I call that the attitude of an ingrate. Don't you?"

"It may interest you to know that I gave him a little lecture a month or two ago," said he irrelevantly.

"A lecture?"

"Yes — on the pernicious influence of delightful frauds."

"I don't understand."

"A complex way of designating the young married woman evil that threatens the youth of our land."

"Oh," she said, staring hard at him. "I see."

"I think he took it rather seriously."

"I dare say." She smiled faintly, but her heart was bitter. "He takes everything you can afford to give him. Advice is so cheap, however, that I don't see how he came to accept it. He deals with luxuries. I wonder — " she hesitated, her eyes narrowing — "I wonder, George, if you were good enough to include me in your assortment of delightful frauds."

"Would you be disappointed and hurt if I should answer no?"

"On the contrary, I'd be pleased."

"Then, you *are* a delightful fraud," he said, with the laugh that she loved. "All of which takes us back to Sedgewick Blynn. He's in love with Bessie Carnahan and she with him. I was thinking of her as well as of him. Do you see?"

"Quite clearly. Being a fine old bachelor, you understand the philanthropy of love. Splendid! But, let me say this to you, my dear brother; if you know as little about Sedgewick Blynn's love affairs as you do about his business transactions, I am not surprised that you can't see through a stone wall." With this frank comment on his stupidity, she left him and went down the steps to greet some new arrivals. As soon as her back was turned, George Pennington's face resumed the grave and troubled look it had worn of late; the taunting smile left his lips and a hard line crept in at the corners.

The Carnahans were coming down from their country place in the hills. A final week-end party was arranged. Sedgewick Blynn and George Pennington were asked among others, and Tuesday was to see the return of every one to the city.

Blynn fought a valiant battle with himself when the time came to leave for the hills, and self won. His mother was now critically ill; it was but a matter of days, if not hours, until the end. The doctor brutally informed him that she might live a week or a day — he could not tell. Pinned down to it, the medical man admitted that

she was more than likely to live a week or two, but he advised the son to be within reach at all times. Sedgewick considered him a heartless brute. The two sisters and Kate O'Brien took turns watching at the bedside of the now helpless old lady, and Sedgewick spent many miserable hours about the house.

Up to the last minute, so to speak, he was firm in his resolve to remain in town, anticipating the crisis. But in this very last minute, the desire to join the gay set in the country overcame what he now called his silly fears and he announced his intention to run out of town over Saturday and Sunday. He sought to reconcile his almost stupefied sisters by demeaning the ability of the doctor; he laughed at the assertion that the end was as "near as all that." Any one could see that she was stronger than she had been in days. It was all nonsense about death being so near at hand.

Nevertheless, as he packed his bag on the morning of departure, he sullenly asked Miss Hettie to telegraph him if there should be a sudden change for the worse. No, he did not expect it, of course, but — it was best to be prepared.

Miss Hettie flared up and wrathfully announced that she would have nothing more to do with him. As he left the house to catch the car, his face set and his heart at war with his brain, he met Kate O'Brien. She was on her way to work.

"Telegraph me, Kate, please, if — if she should get worse?" he pleaded, even humbly.

"Of course I will, Sedge," she said. "You're not — not going away *now?*"

"Just for a day or two. Can't get out of it. Mother's all right. You will telegraph me if — you see, the girls are all upset and I can't depend on them."

"I'll telegraph if — " she hesitated a moment and then went on — "if it's *very* bad."

"That's it," he said. "Thanks."

It must be said that his thoughts were not happy or noble ones as he sat in the chair car which whisked him toward the hills that afternoon. One thing came constantly to his mind and he could not fight it off. It was always up and at him like a persistent ghost. It was the recollection of a night at the horse show, a night when he had taken his mother and sisters to see the world of fashion. Somehow it was hurting him at this late day to remember that he had found seats in the gallery, far from the boxes of his fashionable friends, and that he had entered almost stealthily by the doors farthest from the carriage way. It was coming back to him with ugly plainness that he had shrunk far down in his seat and that he had been ashamed of the meanly clad women who sat beside him in that gay throng. To-day he was ashamed of himself. With a sharp pain in his heart, he recalled his mother's simple, kindly observation that his friends apparently knew him by the company he kept, adding the good-humoured lament that his fine ladies might well be expected to snub him if they saw him with such unfashionable creatures.

And he had been mean enough to reply: "Don't let it worry you, mother. I don't care a hang."

To his surprise and dismay, he found that Beatrice Gray was one of the merry house party. He was considerably upset and annoyed by the discovery. What could Bessie Carnahan be thinking of?

There was to be a dance that night, guests coming over from the other places in the hills. He knew these informal dances to be great fun; his spirits flew upward and he was himself again after a most trying day. He resolutely threw off the shadow of anxiety that had come all the way up from town with him. Why look at the dark side of life when there was a chance to see the bright? It was a philosophy that his mother herself had taught, so why not put it into practice at this very time? He had his mother's own teachings behind him.

Nevertheless, he found himself constantly beseiged by the fear that a telegram might come at any moment.

The railway station and telegraph office was not far from the Carnahan place. Twice during the evening a messenger came over with despatches. Each time his heart seemed to stand still with apprehension. But they were not for him. One came to George Pennington and the other to James Carnahan.

The former, gloomy faced and silent, was standing on the porch when Carnahan came out of the little room which he called his own. The financier was in fine humour.

"Good news, Colonel?" asked Pennington, putting a bright look on his face.

"Splendid. The Henly Water and Power Company has gone to smash. That leaves the field utterly in our hands. I predicted it six weeks ago." Blynn had come up at the beginning of the conversation. "You remember, Blynn, that I told you not to dabble in Henly stock. We had them going from the first. 'Gad, the stockholders in that concern won't get three cents on the dollar. They've partly protected the bonds, that's all."

Pennington's cold, keen gaze fell upon Sedgewick Blynn, and rested there. The young man flushed but manfully arose to the occasion.

"I'm sorry, George," he said. "You don't blame me, do you? That stock looked as good as gold itself."

"It's all right, Sedgewick," was all the other said. Blynn laughed uneasily as he walked away. Alone he sauntered toward the distant gates, a prey not to contrition but to annoyance. As he neared the gates, a messenger from the telegraph office entered the grounds, and, coming directly up to him, asked if a Mr. Blynn was staying there.

Blynn's heart turned icy cold.

"Yes," he said numbly.

"Got a telegram for him. Where 'll I find him?"

"I'll sign for it. He's busy."

The boy promptly surrendered the envelope and went his way.

Sedgewick deliberately stuck the message into his

pocket, the envelope unbroken, and, pulling his nerves together, started toward the house.

Something told him clearly what the message contained but he decided that he would not read it until the next morning!

No one would know!

CHAPTER VI

THE INCONSIDERATE WORLD

CARNAHAN had a talk with his daughter late in the night. She had been with Sedgewick Blynn all evening, quite to the exclusion of other guests. Her father was not slow to perceive the effect this produced on little Beatrice Gray, for whom he had a decided fondness. He resolved to speak plainly and finally on the subject of Sedgewick Blynn.

They were alone in his smoking-room, whither she always went to say good-night, or on the even more frequent business of wheedling extravagant promises out of him.

"You have no right, father, to say such horrid things about Sedgewick and me," she cried after his first vigorous remarks on the unseemly conduct of the two young people.

"Right, my dear child?" he queried, raising his eyebrows in a way that seemed strangely new to her. "If I have n't, then who has? And now that I 'm at it, I shall no longer mince matters in regard to Blynn. Sit down, Bessie. Don't be afraid. I sha'n't scold any more than I have to, but we'll have it out before we go to bed."

She sat down opposite him, staring at his set face with wide, unbelieving eyes.

"I don't know what there really is between you and Sedgewick. You've never told me. In any event, it's puppy love on your side — perhaps, it's some sort of infatuation. With him, it's nothing more or less than a scheme to drop into a warm, luxurious berth for the rest of his life. He's the sort of man who would induce a girl to elope with him. Don't interrupt, please. He knows that no sensible, self-respecting father would ever give a daughter into his hands. It would be criminal on the part — "

"Oh, papa! You don't know what you're saying!"

"Oh, yes, I do. Your dad is no fool, my child. I know men of his stamp as I know my alphabet. The world is full of 'em. Butterfly men! 'Gad, what useless things they are! Pretty to look at, that's all. Sedgewick is the king of his kind. Perhaps you think you are in love with him; perhaps you feel that you are engaged to him. It's barely possible that you have had some sort of a dream that I'll permit you to marry him. But it's out of the question. I'd sooner see you married to a street sweeper than to Sedgewick Blynn. The sweeper at least is a toiler and he's usually honest. That's more than can be said for Sedgewick Blynn."

"Father, you don't mean that!"

"Decidedly, I do. He's crooked. Shall I tell you some of the things I know about him?"

She looked dumbly into his eyes. Somehow she wa

beginning to feel as she did when awakening from a sound sleep to find that her dream and the real world were strangely confused one with the other.

He went on. "In the first place, unquestionably he has deceived and robbed George Pennington. Just a moment, please! I know, and so does George Pennington. He likes the fellow and he won't say a word. He's rich and his losses won't hurt him in that way. But he's suffering because of the duplicity of his trusted friend. Blynn has invested money for him from time to time, always in uncertain schemes from which he derived large commissions as a promoter, so to speak. One instance: he sold Pennington fifty thousand shares of stock that had been given to him personally on condition that he placed another ten thousand at a given price. They were in a zinc and copper mining concern that was practically out of existence when Pennington bought a hundred thousand shares at thirty cents each — thirty thousand dollars for a bunch of worthless paper that had lain in Blynn's safe for months — of which your friend Mr. Blynn got fifteen thousand dollars in cold cash. He knew when he sold these shares to George Pennington that the whole lot of them were not worth thirty cents. That's but one instance. I can almost swear that he has cost Pennington nearly a quarter of a million dollars in the past two or three months. If you should ask Pennington whether he ever expects to trust Blynn with another commission, I think you 'd see him shake his head.

"But all this is as nothing compared to one other transaction of his. I don't like to tell it to you, my child, but I must. The time for soft words has passed. You'll be crying in a minute, but I can't help it. This scamp has deliberately pilfered from his own mother!"

"No, no! He adores her!"

"I'll tell you the story. A few weeks ago Mrs. Blynn came to my office to see me. I knew her husband and loved him in the old days, and I also knew her. The dear old lady, scarcely able to walk, came to see me about some investments Sedgewick had made for her — eight or ten thousand dollars in all, I think. She was worried. Investments that he had made on — on —" the old man's teeth were set — "on my advice, do you see?"

"Then you — I mean, he was not altogether to blame," she had the daring to say.

His eyes snapped. "But as I had never given him a word of advice in my life and knew nothing of his mother's investments, you can hardly say that, Bessie. Plainly, my dear, he lied to her. He sunk her little fortune in schemes of his own and set her mind at rest by telling her that they were safe because *I* was behind them. Now do you see? The money 's gone — utterly lost to her. What's more, my child, this despicable friend of yours has absolutely impoverished the trusting old lady. That's the kind of an adoring son he's been."

Neither spoke for a full minute. The girl's gaze never left her father's eyes. She knew that he never lied to her.

"He may have been perfectly innocent in all this," she murmured.

"Not perfectly innocent, for he told her that I advised him."

"But you — you could not have had the heart to expose him to his mother, father," she said, her lip trembling.

"Are you pitying him or his mother?"

"It's all so very sudden — so shocking," she answered, twisting her fingers in and out.

"I am afraid that I blurted out enough in my surprise to convince her that he had deceived her. I shall always regret my stupidity. Good God, if you could have seen her face when she began to realise. All I might say or do after that unhappy break could not withdraw the iron that had gone into her soul. She understood fully where she had only suspected before, or I believe she half suspected him. Too late I undertook to repair the harm I had done — "

"The harm you had done!"

"Yes — I would not have given her that pain for fifty times ten thousand dollars. I assumed to remember the deal; I pleaded guilty to rank carelessness — I did even more than that. I assured her that her investments were all right."

"You did that?"

"Yes. But she did not believe me. She seemed ten years older when she left my office. There was not much for her to say, but she thanked me. The next day I had my secretary write her a palavering letter to

say that her stock was gilt edged and that I would be glad to buy it back from her at par. Her daughter answered the letter. She said that her mother was most grateful, but that she preferred to keep the stock. You must understand, my child, that the poor old lady knew that there was no stock. Is n't it a pretty story?"

"I can't believe that he would — " she began, horror in her eyes.

"We'll drop his business affairs," said her father, drawing a long breath, "and take up his social gambling."

"Ah," she cried, her face brightening, "you can't say anything against him socially."

"You've heard people say that he is — er — or rather was, carrying on rather recklessly with certain married women — I'll mention no names. Have n't you heard of these stories? Be quite honest."

"I've heard them, of course. But, goodness, every young man does that sort of thing nowadays, unless he's too dreadfully poky to live. It's quite the thing," she said, with conviction. Her father looked at her in dull amazement.

"Great God!" he ejaculated. "You mean to tell me that you — you young girls look upon that sort of thing with your eyes wide open and don't even blush?"

"Pooh! If we blushed every time we had the chance, dad, we'd soon look like birth-marks."

"Good Lord!" he gasped again. He was getting a sharp lesson in worldliness and he did n't like it. For a moment he stared helplessly and then mumbled:

"You've known about these scandalous affairs all the time and still stand out for him? Well, I'm — I'm damned!"

But she was looking very serious; a perplexed frown had succeeded the stare of distress. "I would n't have thought it of him. He has always talked so beautifully of his mother. You must be — "

"I'll bet my head his mother does n't know of his — of the affairs you condone. But never mind that. I see that you're not even shocked. I thought you'd be petrified. Here's something, however, that may bowl you over, my charming philosopher. He's engaged to be married to Beatrice Gray."

"He's not!" she flared, leaping to her feet. "I know that that is n't true!"

"I have her brother's word for it."

"Then he lied! I *know* they're not engaged," she stormed.

Her father understood and he was a very wise man. Instead of pressing the point, he quietly arose and, putting his arm about her waist, led her toward the stairs.

"It's getting late, my dear, and I know you'll want to talk it over with Beatrice. I think he's pulled the wool over two pairs of very beautiful eyes. I'd have it out with Beatrice before I went to sleep, if I were you. You'll both feel much better. And then you can both sympathise with him in the morning."

She sobbed spasmodically for a moment, and then, her cheeks flaming, rushed frantically up-stairs, flying

down the hall to Miss Gray's room. Dashing in upon her rival in this pretty contest, she plumped herself down upon the bed, in which Beatrice was lazily reading.

"Are you engaged to Sedgewick Blynn?" she demanded, without ceremony.

Miss Gray dropped her book. She gasped.

"I mean it!" went on Bessie sternly. "I'm trying to find out something about him."

"I should say you are!" exclaimed Beatrice.

"Well, are you?" insistently.

"Not just at present. Are you?"

"Were you — ever?"

"I asked: Are you?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out. I don't know. I thought I was."

"I thought I was, too, until — until — "

"Until when? Speak out! I'm not going to bite your head off."

"Until this evening. I don't mind telling you that I broke it off to-night. I hate and despise him. You may have him. I don't want him."

"Oh, thank you kindly," scoffed Miss Carnahan. "I was just going to offer him to you."

"Indeed!"

They glared at each other for a moment and then burst into uncontrollable laughter. An instant later they were hysterically kissing one another and thanking all the lucky stars in the universe that they had found out the truth about Sedgewick Blynn. Each was amazed

to find that there were no heart pangs, after all; they spoke of Sedgewick as if he were dead and buried. They slept better that night than they had slept in weeks. Sedgewick Blynn was off their minds.

He did not sleep well, however. He could not take his mind from the telegram which remained sealed in his pocket. A dreadful oppression, a sense of utter gloom came over him. He wished now that he had read it before — or, more than that, he regretted that he had left home.

Morning came, and he sallied forth, the telegram in his pocket. He went toward the gates, ostensibly to meet the messenger boy as if by accident. In one of the driveways he came upon Bessie Carnahan and Beatrice Gray, who, having slept together, were out for a before breakfast stroll together.

The irrepressible Miss Carnahan confronted him, her face beaming with malicious joy in contemplation of his coming discomfiture.

"Now, here we are, Sedgewick," she said sweetly. "Two pretty girls and both free. Take your pick. Which will you have? A brunette or a blonde?"

He gulped and looked blankly from one to the other. He understood. It required a mighty effort of the will to hold himself together, but he succeeded. Into his face came a depressed, anxious look; his eyes seemed to express the fear that consumed him. Even in this trying moment he was able to play on the heart-strings of those who would have tormented him; he deliberately

turned his own miserable apprehensions to account, dropping easily into the centre of the stage as any vainglorious actor might have done. He said nothing until he had drawn the telegram from his pocket. His hand trembled as he passed it to the surprised Miss Carnahan.

"It just came," he said. "I'm afraid to open it. My mother's not been well. She was much better when I left home. Still one always expects bad news. Won't you please read it for me?"

Bessie Carnahan's smile of derision vanished, just as he had planned that it should. Apprehension and pity succeeded in its place; she experienced a sudden sensation of regret for her miserable levity. A sober, anxious look also crept into Beatrice Gray's eyes.

The girl resolutely tore open the envelope and glanced at the message. She turned deathly pale and her lip trembled; tears rushed to her eyes; impulsively she thrust the missive into the hands of Beatrice Gray.

"I can't — oh, I can't tell him," she cried piteously. Sedgewick Blynn knew then that the worst had happened, but, despite all that, a thrill of exaltation swept over him. He had played for and won sympathy where scorn had been promised. Verily, he was master in his own domain!

He did not wait for Beatrice Gray to read the word from Kate O'Brien, but took the message from her unresisting hand. They watched him as he read; they saw the honest look of pain and despair steal into his face; they saw his lips tremble and the tears rush to his

eyes. With a piteous gesture to indicate his powerlessness to speak, he turned and walked slowly toward a bench beneath the trees. Then, completely overcome by their emotions, the two girls hastened to the house with their blighting news. They could not find the courage to offer consolation in the face of that silent, manly exhibition of grief.

Later on, he started for the city, crushed and shaken, completely overwhelmed by the sorrow that had fallen upon him. George Pennington would have accompanied him, but he declined the proffer of company. He wanted to be alone. Something had told him that Pennington, as well as the others, had seen into his soul and in secret despised him; he felt sure that every one knew intuitively that he had come away from home with the full knowledge that his mother was on her death-bed.

What he did not know, though he may have feared it as a possibility, was the cruel fact that young Gately had seen the telegram delivered to him the night before!

He was barely out of the grounds on his way to the station before every one in the party was in possession of Gately's news. And then it was that Sedgewick Blynn was forever damned in the hearts of his friends. No word was too bitter in the storm of denunciation that followed. When he left the gates below it was to step out of the life he had loved, never to find his way back into it again.

He went down into the city that sunny day wrapped in the blackest mantle that shame and self-pity could

produce. As well as if it had been printed in letters a mile high, he saw the verdict that had been rendered against him. The world knew and it would not forgive!

Bleak and desolate, he watched the mileposts speed by, a thousand bitter thoughts accumulating in his brain, the most insistent of which was the outraged feeling that his mother had done him a great and unbelievable wrong by dying while he was away! She had no right to bring this down upon him! It was cruel, unbelievably cruel! What had he done to deserve this cruel blow from one he had loved and stood by through all his struggling years!

The world and all that therein was had turned against him — even to the dead woman who lay there in his home, a thing to cast mockery and obloquy upon him even to the edge of the grave!

A woman with a small, curiously inclined child — a girl of four — sat in the seat ahead of him. For miles the little one looked in silent wonder upon the face of this sombre, haggard man behind, peering over the back of the seat into his unseeing eyes. She would have liked to be friendly. The woman's instinct in her little breast told her that this man needed kind words and sympathy. At last, her piping, timid little voice broke through the reserve of miles. He heard her words and replied, dully, almost harshly.

She said, with childish ingenuousness:

"I'm just gettin' over the chicken-pox." It was the best that she could do.

He replied, without knowing what he said: "Did you enjoy it?" The harsh twang in his voice silenced the child; she shrank back and gave up the effort to befriend him. But she still studied his face with wondering eyes.

As the train neared the city, he found himself suddenly entertaining a wish that he might die at once and end it all! If he could but die then and there he would not have to look upon the dead face of his mother; he could escape the smile of love and longing that must have gone out with her at the last — the sweet, trusting smile that had tried to wait for him to come back to it before it was stilled in death. Suicide! He could end it all in a moment's time! A fall between the rushing cars! No! No! He shrank back from his thoughts in a terror so great that the child ahead turned to cling to her mother in dire affright. Then he smiled wanly upon his little, would-be friend.

The terror had passed; life was too sweet, after all.

A satirical smile deepened in his face. He was thinking now of Mary Colbert's husband, who had committed suicide. Colbert had been a polite man and punctilious. The day that he shot himself, he calmly wrote a letter of apology to Mrs. Trend, with whom he and his wife were to dine that night. Sedgewick recalled the historic words of that grim epistle. He wondered if he could have done it. Colbert had written to say that his "own unfortunate death would prevent Mr. and Mrs. Colbert from accepting Mrs. Trend's kind invitation to dinner, after all. Trusting that Mrs. Trend would not

be greatly inconvenienced by the lateness of this withdrawal," etc. Then he coolly shot himself. But everybody in town marvelled at the grim humour which must have been his to the last.

And so Sedgewick came back to the house in Lombard Avenue, and saw the smile on his dead mother's lips, and wondered how it was that she could have been so cruel as to die without saying good-bye to him and kissing him before she went!

CHAPTER VII

CONTEMPLATING THE CHRYSALIS

SEDGEWICK BLYNN went into the deepest, most consistent mourning for his mother. His sisters, forgiving him at the crucial moment in their joint misery, were surprised by the steadfastness which characterised his professed rejection of all things worldly. They could hardly believe that this sober stay-at-home was the same youth who had gone whirling with the world of pleasure a few short months before. For months after his mother's death he was never away from home at night, nor would he have anything to do with the world which had known him so long and so well. He had calmly announced in the beginning that he could not make room in his heart for the tender memory of a mother and thoughts of the callous, sordid world as he had come to know it.

He gave them to understand that he intended to cut himself off from his old, heartless associates, whether they liked it or not. But his sisters never were to know of the bitterness that filled his heart as he looked the real situation in the face. His world had renounced him! It gave him plainly to understand in a thousand little ways,

by a hundred poignant snubs, that it was through with him. He had run his course. But he firmly, resolutely faced it all with a splendid foil — pitiful, abject grief over the loss of his mother. Those who came in contact with him seldom failed to speak, in subdued tones, of the remarkable and at the same time irreproachable grief which had altered him so completely.

He eschewed every form of social pleasure; he resigned from his clubs; he ate in obscure cafés; he seemed to be utterly overwhelmed by his bereavement. Certain friends of the old days, callow chaps who could have forgiven his verbally published shortcomings for the sufficient reason that they did not have brains enough to retain so much, undertook a movement to re-establish him among those who had politely but effectually forgotten him. The movement failed. Grief, however picturesque and glorified, is not the sesame which opens the way to the treasures of society.

For weeks after the funeral the city, or rather that portion of the city which inhabits the society columns by day and its own secret fastnesses by night, throbbed with requiems for Sedgewick Blynn. Tales concerning him spread like wildfire. He became the most execrated man in town — a social pariah. His world had found him out, and after all his world was one that sets a certain standard for the dwellers therein. He had dropped below that standard.

After the first shock of realisation had been lessened by time and calculation, Blynn permitted his hopes and

his spirits to venture forth on an expedition of inquiry. He searched eagerly, feverishly, for the first faint signs of friendliness among those who had cast him off. Both his hopes and his spirits were soon drenched by the chill damp of a no uncertain aversion. No one gave him greeting, no one offered a hand by which he might lift himself above the quicksands into which he had blindly wandered. They were quite content to see him sink out of sight, as if he had never been there at all.

At first he could not fully appreciate the extent of his fall from grace. Not until his former friends and advocates deliberately passed him by with not so much as a nod of recognition was he able to grasp the bitter truth. Women to whom he had played knight-errant, for whom he had run the errands in the race for favour, now cut him dead in public places. A dozen times had he started to lift his hat to these erstwhile friends, only to have them turn away from him with unmistakable repulsion in their manner.

He was stunned at first, then ugly and resentful. To himself he said, a thousand times over, that he could tell the world something about these very dames that would cause it to sit up and gasp. He knew them well, or, at least, so he tried to convince himself. And yet, after all, he was constrained to sink back powerless and impotent in the remembrance that he merely had played the same game with them, and that it was a harmless, innocuous game after all — the game called Experience. It was a gay, a somewhat boisterous game when one came

to understand its crudities; the outside world never got beyond coveting its delicate possibilities. The outside world is vulgar. At least, so Sedgewick Blynn had always argued. Now he considered it worse than vulgar: it was stupid!

It is charitable to say that he did not mistake the kindness of certain old friends at the time of the funeral. George Pennington had served as one of the bearers and so had James Carnahan. Many people in the upper world slyly had sent flowers to the house in Lombard Avenue. It was their final and secret tribute to the memory of Sedgewick Blynn, not a tribute to his mother by any manner of means.

The sisters of Sedgewick Blynn were touched by these beautiful testimonials from the world to which he, not they, belonged.

Kate O'Brien was as deeply impressed; her opinion of the smart set changed considerably at that time. After all, its people were not such narrow, selfish creatures as she had come to believe them by contact. She could not understand why they had sent flowers to the bier of humble Mrs. Blynn, unless it was that in their hearts there was a warmer spring than her own dealings with them had led her to believe they possessed. She had been permitted to view them at rather close range, too, from her particular walk in life, it may be believed.

Shunned by the people he had served with almost servile, obliging earnestness, Sedgewick Blynn, as we have said before, shrank back beaten and cowed into

the obscurity of a convenient grief. The world should never know, by any sign from him, how the other thing was biting into his soul. It was enough that he was bereaved, and it was more than enough that he had decided, once and for all, to abandon the useless, vacuous life of fashion for the steady, toilsome existence of a real spinner.

He got it all very straight from Mrs. Trend one day. Determined to learn precisely how he stood with that excellent leader, he accosted her in front of Swan's. Without waiting for an invitation, he stepped into the victoria beside her, and ruthlessly implored her to set him straight with the world. She eyed him coldly, almost admiringly. His confidence, his ingenuousness was sublime. But he was beyond the pale. She could not take him up again. Even her exalted position would not be proof against the tempest of indignation that would follow the effort. She was compelled to speak plainly and without mercy.

"You ask why people cut you, why they do not invite you to their homes, why you have been obliged to resign from the clubs. Why should you ask, Mr. Blynn? The reason is even plainer to you than to any one else. I'll be quite frank with you. I think it is best that you should understand clearly that there is no chance for you to ever regain the smallest foothold in society, or such of it as you have known. You were one of the chosen young men. You could have lived to the end of your days among the elect, if you had shown yourself worthy. You

amused people, and that is saying a great deal in these days. But you also abused them, which is more to the point. To be perfectly plain, every one has come to regard you — not as a cad — but as a man who never rightfully belonged. No one can ever forget that you played your mother false. If you would do that, you would play the rest of us false. You knew that she was dying when you — no, you must listen to me! when you left her bedside that day. But you could not forego your own selfish pleasure, even for that. You squandered her little fortune. You inveigled a devoted though foolish friend into bad speculations and you profited by his losses. You trifled with two young girls — more, perhaps — and you would have eloped with one of them. You see we know it all! It may interest you to know that we never took you seriously. We are not so blind as all that. You were a splendid ornament, a purchasable commodity. We did not know it then, but now we are quite sure that we bought you with kind words away from the mother who loved you. It was a bad trade, Mr. Blynn. We meant nothing, she was everything. You became a butterfly; you snapped your shell and flew up among us. We admire butterflies but we don't pin much faith to them. Now you ask why I do not ask you to my house, quietly, you say, for you are in mourning. I'll answer that rather brutally, Mr. Blynn, by asking you in return: for what, not whom, are you in mourning?"

He looked hard into her cold, uncompromising eyes for a moment, and then, with a short "Good-bye," which

was in reality his farewell to the world over which she was queen, deliberately stepped out of the victoria and went his bitter way.

And so he went down into his oblivion with a surly heart and in bitter spirit. He turned to his sisters and to Kate O'Brien, and to the humble, unworldly people of Lombard Avenue. To them he gravely descanted upon the evils of society and forswore it to their faces with such convincing vehemence that they believed him to be a brand rescued from the burning.

And they delighted in listening to his vainglorious tales of the upper world; he could open the secret recesses to their wondering gaze, and they could see to the very heart of the thing that he called Rottenness!

Pennington had gone out of his life without a word to cheer or encourage. He took himself off to Paris; it was said by his friends that he fled because he was afraid to run the risk of propinquity!

Lombard Avenue discovered one day, to its surprise, and we might say mortification, that Sedgewick Blynn and Kate O'Brien were to be married. Lombard Avenue could not understand how it was that Sedgewick Blynn could descend to its level in a matter of this kind; it had always believed that he was cut out to be husband to nothing less than the daughter of a banker, or perhaps even the more ostentatious production of a millionaire milliner.

Moreover, the Avenue was disturbed to learn that he had given up his office in the Street and was considering

a proposition to become city salesman for an automobile concern, with hope beyond. His sisters, apparently in a mood to seek surcease from grief and desolation, had long since continued to find it, in a measure, by working all day long in the office of the County Recorder. The Avenue was very slow to see things.

Kate O'Brien loved Sedgewick, but she was not so dense as to overlook his faults, even though she loved him blindly. She realised better than any one else just what sort of a man he had been and what she would have to contend with. Somehow she had a feeling that, in time, she could refurbish him and teach him to live "according to his lights." He cared for her in a way; he cared as a beaten dog cares for the one whose hand is gentle and whose voice is soft. She had been his friend through all the years and she had not denied him by look or word. He caught himself dreaming of the future; he might be able to raise her to a social level equal to that of the dyspepsia-tablet maker's wife, who was, in a way, one of the recognised forces in society, although it was quite out of place for one to speak of the digestion in her presence. Perhaps, as he went upward in the automobile business — or, more likely, the flying machine industry — he might hope to polish her into a social brilliance such as even the wife of the omnibus company's president could not surpass nor the great-granddaughter of a Plymouth Rock merchant deny.

Kate was clever enough; all she lacked was the tone that he could give to her.

Occasionally he took her to the play or to the vaudeville. In return she had him to lunch at the Italian restaurant in Bothwerk Street or took him to church of a Sunday morning.

One night, just a week before the wedding, she timidly — for she was still in some awe of his past prowess — broached a subject that had long been in her mind to discuss with him, plainly and decisively. They had just returned to her home after having witnessed a comedy in one of the theatres. It was the first time in more than a year that he had been inside this playhouse, where on innumerable occasions he had sat with gay box parties as one of the fortunate few at whom all people stared. This night he sat beside pretty Kate O'Brien, head of the dressmaking department, in a seat not far removed from the stage, his face set and his eyes glued to the drop curtain or the open stage, as the changes came. Around about them sat dozens of people whom he knew. He was afraid to look at them. Kate observed this; it was the thing that she was bringing herself to discuss with him.

"Look here, Sedge, were you ashamed to be seen with me to-night?" she found the courage to demand at last. She was taking her hat off in the parlour.

He came out of his reverie. "Ashamed? What do you mean, Kate?"

"All of your fine friends were there. They did n't seem to see you, and I noticed that you were n't rubbering very much in their direction. That 's why I asked



"She was compelled to speak plainly and without mercy"

if you were — well, were you afraid they would n't speak to you if they saw you sitting there with me? I 'm only a working girl, you know. It — "

He patted her hand reassuringly, even condescendingly. "Nonsense," he said. "You know better than that. Am I not a working man these days? Have n't I cut it all out? Ashamed of you, Kate? I should say not. You 're worth all of 'em put together."

"I don't like your tone, Sedge. I 'm not a child, you know. I can see a thing or two. Why did n't Mrs. Osgood and Miss Perrin and Mrs. Ostertag speak to you? They looked right at you and — and, well, they turned away. I saw them do it. Look here, Sedge, am I going to be the cause of your old friends never speaking to you? Are they always going to cut you when they see us together? If that 's so I 'll give up — "

"They sha'n't cut me, damn 'em," he cried viciously. "I won't let them. I 'll make them sit up and take notice; just you watch me." Then catching himself up, he swiftly returned to his attitude of tolerance. "Never mind, Kate, if what you think should be true, it can't make any difference. They can't change me, not by a long shot. You 're good enough for me, so there 's the end of it."

"But will you always think that way?" she insisted, almost pleadingly. "Won't you feel it after a while when they — when they keep on failing to see you — when you 're with me? And, more than that, pretty soon they 'll quit seeing you when you 're not with me.

Oh, I know! I know that a man can't be on the fence with these people. He 's got to get down on one side or the other. If he gets down on the side they don't care about, he 's out of it forever, so far as they are concerned."

"Have n't I told you a hundred times that I don't give a damn what they think?" he cried irascibly. "I 've got down on your side of the fence, so what 's the row, dear? I knew what I was doing. I wanted you, and I want to live quietly and happily, not in that awful roar I 've been used to. I 've told — er — a dozen women that I 'm going to marry you."

"You have, dear? What did they say?" with eager curiosity.

"Say? What could they say?" he stammered, realising that he had lied to some disadvantage.

"I 'll bet they laughed at you and turned up their noses," she said, her cheeks flaming.

"Now, let 's talk about something else," he exclaimed, palpably evasive. He was mean enough to let it stand that she should know, then and there, that he was sacrificing his whole social career for her.

"But I 'm thinking of you, Sedgewick, dear," she cried earnestly. "Think now, before it is too late. They won't speak to me, except in the shop. You 'll be cutting yourself off altogether — "

"My dear, that 's what they 've all told me," he said, with fine defiance in his eyes. He arose and put his arm about her shoulders.

"They — have?" she faltered.

His eyes flashed. "Yes. They said I 'd be ruining my career and all that. I 'll be perfectly frank with you, Kate. That 's what they said. They begged me to give it all up and — er — and come back into the old playground, but — now I want you to believe this forever more — I politely told 'em that I cared more for your little finger than I did for the whole darned universe."

She was crying on his shoulder. It inspired him to more heroic utterances. He added vehemently: "And that 's no lie, either!"

After the marriage, a week later, the happy bride looked slyly but in vain through the society columns of the daily press for notices of the wedding.

THE END